

William Neufeld

From Faith



To Faith

The History of the Manitoba Mennonite Brethren Church

From Faith To Faith

William Neufeld

From Faith To Faith

The History of the Manitoba Mennonite Brethren Church



Winnipeg, MB Canada

Hillsboro, KS USA

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Neufeld, William, 1908-

From faith to faith: the history of the Manitoba Mennonite Brethren Church

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN: 0-919797-92-X

1. Mennonite Brethren Church - Manitoba - History

I. Title

BX8118.6.M3N484 1989 289.7'7127 C89-098101-9

FROM FAITH TO FAITH

Copyright © 1989 by Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Winnipeg, MB, Canada

Publication for From Faith to Faith made possible by funding from Center of Mennonite Brethren Studies, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Published simultaneously by Kindred Press, Winnipeg, Manitoba R2L 2E5 and Kindred Press, Hillsboro, KS 67063

All rights reserved. With the exception of brief excerpts for reviews, no part of this book may be reproduced without the written permission of the publisher.

Cover design by Fred Koop, Winnipeg

Printed in Canada by The Christian Press, Winnipeg, Manitoba

International Standard Book Number: 0-919797-92-X

PREFACE

The publication of this history in the centennial year of the Mennonite Brethren Church of Manitoba and of Canada is most appropriate. Already several years ago, when only the first draft of the history was completed, various centennial committees, in preparation for this year of celebration, consulted the manuscript to answer questions of who, when, where and why. Already at that point in time it served as a welcome resource on the early developments of the first Mennonite Brethren Church in Canada.

As with most manuscripts of such broad scope, this one had a long period during which the research, writing and editing was completed. The idea for the history actually began with the suggestion, by the Historical Committee of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, that every provincial conference in Canada take steps to write its own history. The first province to take up the challenge was Manitoba. In 1980 Rev. William Neufeld, a long-time teacher and minister both in Manitoba and British Columbia was selected to research and write the manuscript.

It soon became apparent that the research and writing would take considerably longer than originally anticipated, as is usually the case with such projects. But over the years the manuscript came into being and Brother Neufeld's many, many hours of research and writing have resulted in the history being available this centennial year of the Mennonite Brethren Church of Canada.

Mention must be made of some of the people who had a large part in the production of this volume. First were the numerous pastors, teachers, conference leaders and church workers who were interviewed and provided documents relevant to the manuscript. An editorial committee consisting of William Schroeder of Winkler and Herb Giesbrecht and Ken Reddig of Winnipeg spent hours reviewing the manuscript in its various stages. Final editorial work was completed by Dora Dueck, also of Winnipeg.

A final word must be said about the writer of this history. Brother Neufeld was born in Russia and came to Canada as a youth, settling in Manitoba. For 26 years he served as a teacher both in Manitoba secondary schools and later at the Mennonite Educational Institute in British Columbia. During these years of teaching he was very active in various church activities. For over a decade he served as pastor of the North Kildonan Mennonite Brethren Church. As such he approaches the story of the Mennonite Brethren Church not in a critical historical sense, but with a sense of love and appreciation. He himself has lived through a large part of this history and learned to know some of the influential leaders, particularly of this century. To him belongs

the credit for completing this labour of love and dedication of a church which has been a major part of his life. A retired minister yes, but he also is an untiring servant who has served the entire Canadian Mennonite Brethren Conference well, by having given to us a portrait of the birth and development of the Manitoba Mennonite Brethren Church throughout its first 100 years.

Ken Reddig, Conference Archivist

Table of Contents

PART I

WHO AM I, O SOVEREIGN LORD, AND WHAT IS MY FAMILY, THAT YOU HAVE BROUGHT ME THIS FAR (2 Sam. 7:18)

Chapter 1. Our Anabaptist Heritage 3

A. Europe in the time of Reformation

The Swiss Brethren - The Dutch Brethren

B. Principles of Anabaptism

The Word of God - Conversion - Baptism and the Lord's Supper - Discipleship - Sharing the Faith - Nonresistance - The Church

C. The Mennonites

Mennonites in Prussia - Mennonites in Russia - The Founding of the Mennonite Brethren Church - Emigration from Russia

Chapter 2. Manitoba Mennonites of 1874-1900 13

Chapter 3. The Early Years of the Mennonite Brethren Church in the United States 17

Part II

ENLARGE THE PLACE OF YOUR TENT (Is. 54:2)

Chapter 4. The First Missionary Venture 23

A. The American Mennonite Brethren Concern

B. Heinrich Voth

The missionary efforts of Heinrich Voth - Opposition

Chapter 5. The First Mennonite Brethren Churches in Manitoba . 29

A. Establishment of the First MB Church, 1888, at Burwalde

B. Expansion of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Manitoba, 1888-1922

Witnessing and Evangelism - David Dyck - Church Life - The Church
Matures - Johann Warkentin - Sunday School - Choirs - Mission Ef-
forts - Youth Work - Winkler - Grossweide - Kronsart - Winnipeg

Chapter 6. Growth by Immigration 39

A. Immigration in the 1920s

Settlements

B. Churches Begun by Immigrants

Worship and Church Activities - Common Problems within the Church
- Churches Organized by Immigrants

C. The 1930 Mennonite Immigration

D. Immigration after World War II

Late Arrivals from Russia

Chapter 7. Membership Migration 55

A. Depression and Its Influence

B. Shifting Membership through Urbanization

C. Migration of Members by Division of Churches

River East MB Church - McIvor Avenue MB Church - Portage Avenue
MB Church - Fort Garry MB Church - Westwood Community Church

PART III

WE, WHO ARE MANY, FORM ONE BODY (1 Cor. 10:17)

Chapter 8. Uniting the Scattered Churches 65

A. Spiritual Concerns

B. Incorporation

Constitution

C. The Northern District of the Manitoba MB Conference

D. Women's Conference of Manitoba MB Churches

PART IV

DO NOT SPARE; LENGTHEN YOUR CORDS (Is. 54:2)

Chapter 9. Outreach Efforts of the Manitoba MB Conference . . . 83

A. Winnipeg City Mission

B. Gospel Light Mission of Brandon

Chapter 10. Randmission and Home Missions 95

A. First Timid Efforts in Evangelism

B. The Period of 1943-1969

Randmission - West Reserve - East Reserve - Lindal - Ashern - Winnipegosis - Tent Mission - The Search for a Workable Mission Policy - Colportage - DVBS - Field man - Ashern, the First Mission Casualty - A Period of Transition - Lindal, a Happy Termination - Winnipegosis, a Pragmatic Conclusion - Tent Mission Delights - Horndean - Carman - Brooklands Community Church - Westview MB Church, Portage la Prairie - Executive Secretary

Chapter 11. Mission and Church Extension - Part I 117

A. 1969 To the Present

Determining Mission's Direction - Chaplaincy and Hospital Work

B. New Horizons - The North

The Pas - Leaf Rapids - Snow Lake - Grace Church of Cranberry Portage - Thompson Christian Centre Fellowship, Mennonite - Unique Problems of the North - Ben Falk - Simonhouse Lake Camp - The Northern District of the Manitoba MB Conference

Chapter 12. Missions and Church Extension - Part II 131

A. Suburban Activities

Westwood - A Philosophy of Church Planting was Developed - Maples - L'Eglise Chretienne Evangelique de St. Boniface - Transcona - Selkirk - Valley Gardens

B. Inner City Attempts

Living Bible Explorers - Portuguese Mission - Christian Resource

Centre - Cornerstone Christian Fellowship of the MB Church - Vietnamese/Chinese Church (Mennonite Affiliated)

C. Cooperative Mission Ventures

Hospital Chaplaincy - Resort Ministry - Gillam Inter-Faith Ministry - Book Rack Evangelism

Chapter 13. Radio and Mennonite Brethren Communications . . 143

A. Beginnings

The English Program

B. Program Expansion

The German Program - Children's Gospel Light Hour - The Russian Program - Low German Program - Teen Program - Television Productions - Cassettes

C. Goals

PART V

STRENGTHEN YOUR STAKES (Is. 54:2)

Chapter 14. Strengthening Church Activities 157

A. Sunday School

Sunday School Lessons - Sunday School Leadership Training - Mission Sunday School and DVBS

B. Music and Choirs

C. Youth Work

D. University Student Services

Chapter 15. Educational Efforts 171

A. Bible Schools

Peniel, Winkler Bible School - Building Program - Philosophy of Winkler Bible School - Influence of the School - Steinbach Bible School - Winnipeg Bible School

B. Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute

Rationale and Beginnings - Buildings - Curriculum - Spiritual Emphasis - MBCI Philosophy of Christian Education - Unterstuetzungsverein (Support Society) of the MBCI

PART VI

WORKERS TOGETHER WITH HIM (2 Cor. 6:1)

Chapter 16. Cooperative Activities with Other Churches and Organizations	193
--	-----

A. Inter-Mennonite Relations

Bible Conferences - Evangelism - Educational Efforts

B. Cooperation in Relief Efforts

Alternative Service Cooperation - Homes for the Elderly - Hospitals -
Eden Mental Health Center, Winkler

PART VII

FOR OTHER FOUNDATION CAN NO MAN LAY THAN THAT IS LAID WHICH IS JESUS CHRIST (1 Cor. 3:11)

Chapter 17. Influences	205
----------------------------------	-----

A. Influence upon M.B. Theology and Practice Acculturation

B. Acculturation

Effects upon Church and Christian Life

C. Conclusion

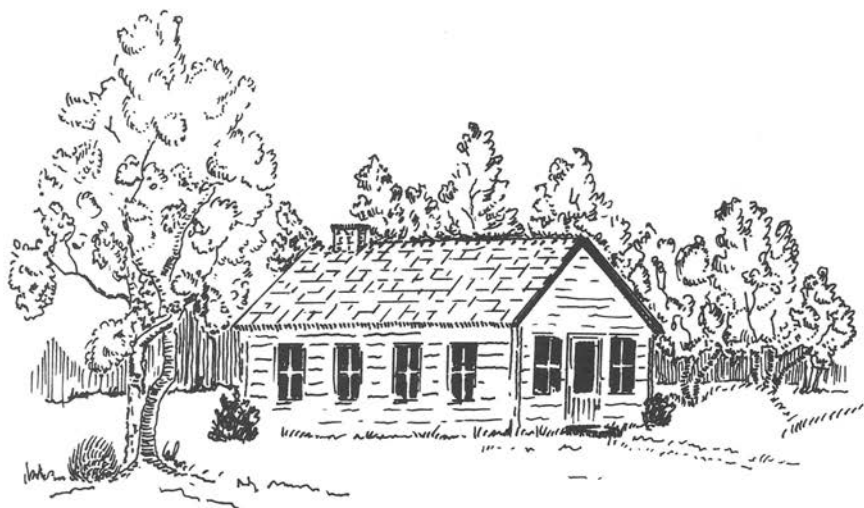
Appendix	217
--------------------	-----

The Beginning . . .

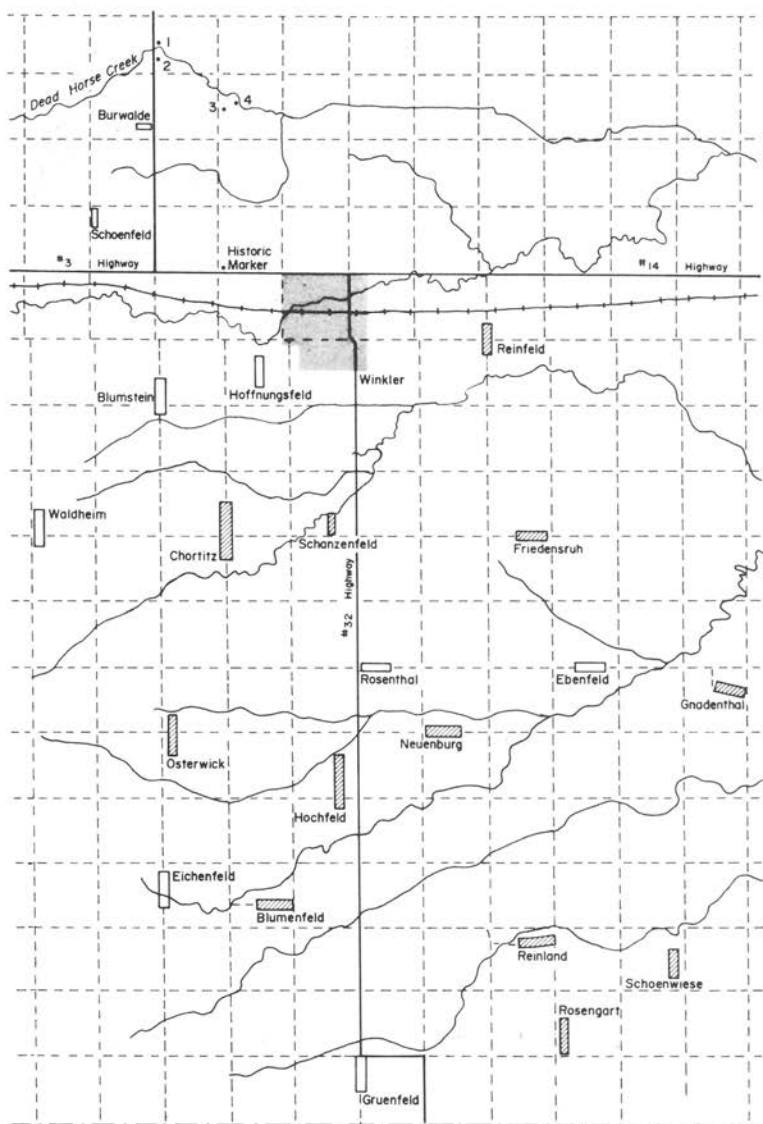
It was a warm afternoon, May 30, 1886, at a shady turn of the tortuous Dead Horse Creek in southern Manitoba, that two Mennonite couples, Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Banman and Mr. and Mrs. John Nickel, publicly testified to a new life in Jesus Christ by immersion baptism. A number of believers, a few sympathizers, and curious onlookers had gathered to witness this act of faith. This was the very first baptism in Canada by a Mennonite Brethren minister, Heinrich Voth of Mountain Lake, Minnesota. On June 13, 1886, at the same place two more were baptized: Mrs. Heinrich Hoeppner and Peter Hoeppner. In 1887 several more confessed their faith in Jesus Christ and were baptized

...

It was not until 1888, after a few Mennonite Brethren families had immigrated to the Winkler area from Russia (among them a minister, Gerhard Wiebe), that the first Mennonite Brethren Church was organized with 16 members at Burwalde, Manitoba - the first M.B. Church in Canada.



MENNONITE BRETHREN BEGINNINGS ON THE WEST RESERVE William Schroeder



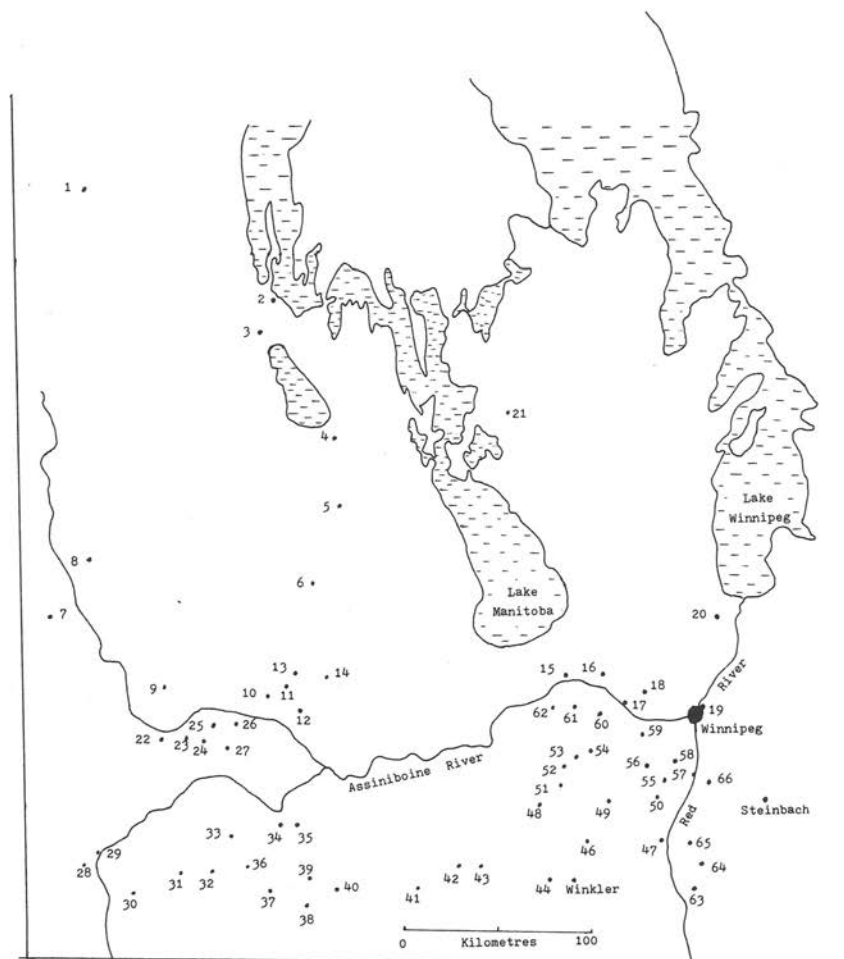
Present village
Former village site
Roads in square mile grid
Creeks
C.P.R. completed in 1883

- 1 Burwalde school till 1937
- 2 Burwalde school since 1937
- 3 Mennonite Brethren Church 1889-1897
- 4 Site of first two baptisms in 1886

Drawn by Dianne Harms

Place Names/Locations of Mennonite Brethren Churches

25 Alexander	28 Elva	34 Margaret	18 Rossner
64 Arnaud	54 Fannystelle	16 Marquette	56 Sanford
21 Ashern	3 Fork River	7 McAuley	49 Sperling
51 Barnsley	10 Forrest	5 McCreary	59 Springstein
27 Beresford	61 Fortier	29 Melita	65 St. Elizabeth
36 Boissevain	8 Foxwarren	13 Moore Park	4 Ste. Rose du
14 Brookdale	57 Glenlea	44 Morden	67 Steinbach
33 Croll	48 Graysville	47 Morris	1 Swan River
41 Crystal City	23 Griswold	6 Mountain Road	24 Terrence
53 Culross	40 Holmfield	46 Myrtle	30 Waskada
31 Deloraine	11 Justice	62 Newton Siding	32 Whitewater
37 Desford	26 Kemnay	66 Niverville	45 Winkler
55 Domain	9 Kenton	19 North Kildonan	68 Winnipeg
63 Dominion City	39 Killamey	22 Oak Lake	2 Winnipegosis
12 Douglas	42 La Riviere	50 Osborne	
35 Dunrea	58 La Salle	20 Petersfield	
60 Elie	38 Lena	17 Pigeon Lake	
52 Elm Creek	43 Manitou	15 Poplar Point	



Part I

WHO AM I, O SOVEREIGN
LORD, AND WHAT IS MY
FAMILY, THAT YOU HAVE
BROUGHT ME THIS FAR
(2 Sam. 7:18)

Chapter 1

OUR ANABAPTIST HERITAGE

To better understand, and to evaluate, the Mennonite Brethren Church of today, let us review briefly the history of the Anabaptist movement and its original tenets and practice.

A. Europe in the Reformation

In the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, Europe experienced an awakening in learning, art, exploration, and trade. This ferment, quite naturally, included a questioning of traditional religious precepts and practices, like the corruption of church officials, the low moral standards of priests, the unrestrained sale of indulgences for sins committed or intended, the secularization of sacred tenets and the arrogant authority of the Pope. Erasmus' translation of the New Testament was instrumental in awakening many scholars to the truth of God's Word. Luther's principles of reformation, aided by the desperate economic situation of the peasantry in Europe and the long-standing quarrel between the nobles and the Pope brought about a general rebellion against the Catholic Church in the northern German states, Switzerland, Austria, the Netherlands, England, and Scandinavia.

The Swiss Brethren

At the same time, the Swiss began to question Catholic practices and doctrines. Zwingli, a preacher in Einsiedeln and later Zurich, opposed indulgences, fasts, images, and particularly the mercenary system (men forced to fight for the Pope). He was effectively supported by the magistrates of Zurich and the educated men of Switzerland.

Among the latter were several outstanding young men - Felix Manz, Conrad Grebel, Reuchlin, a dynamic preacher from Sytekön, and Georg Blaurock, a monk who, in their study of the New Testament concluded that Zwingli did not go far enough in his reformation efforts. They agreed with his moves to abolish the mass, reject celibacy of priests, dissolve monasteries, and introduce the vernacular in church services, but they also

opposed infant baptism, believing that, according to the New Testament, baptism must follow faith in Jesus Christ. They emphasized consistent discipleship of believers, and the granting of church membership to true, adult Christians only.

When Zwingli and the Zurich Council opposed them, these men ventured out to create their own church modelled after the early apostolic one. At this historic meeting on January 21, 1525, Blaurock entreated Conrad Grebel to baptize him upon his confession of faith in Jesus Christ. With trembling, Grebel solemnly complied. Then Blaurock baptized the others. Thus "Anabaptism was born."¹

"The significance of this step lies in the fact that it marks the complete break with the state church party, and inaugurated a new church based on the revolutionary principle of religious freedom, a church membership upon confession of faith, and believer's baptism."²

Persecution began immediately, with imprisonment or exile marked for all who sided with the "brethren." The Imperial Diet of 1529 outlawed Anabaptism. Because of this intense persecution the brethren and many of their adherents moved north to Moravia, the Palatinate, the Upper Rhine, and the Netherlands. Wherever they went, they spread the liberating gospel.

The Dutch Brethren

As in other European countries, there was unrest and agitation in the Netherlands against the Catholic Church and the state. The Anabaptist reform principles found ready response here. Two brothers, Obbe and Dirk Philips, accepted the teaching of the Anabaptists and soon became effective leaders of the movement.

Under the strong leadership of Menno Simons, a former Catholic priest, the believers were gathered into church organization. The state put a ransom on Menno's head and for some twenty-five years he lived as a fugitive, seeking refuge in friendly cities. Constant physical and emotional strain undermined his health; he died in northern Germany. In spite of the intense persecution, he was able, with his preaching, counselling and writing, to consolidate the church during these years. His followers became known as "Men-nists."

More than 1500 martyrs died during these early years of Anabaptism in the Netherlands alone. Because of the relentless persecution, many Mennonites fled to places of refuge and tolerance. Most of them settled in the Vistula Delta area, which was later annexed by Prussia.

B. Principles of Anabaptism

Mennonites today are heirs of the radical Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth century, which opposed the traditional doctrines of the Catholic Church, but also insisted that the efforts of the Reformation fell short of New Testament standards. Every movement will, in the course of time, however, undergo changes, the Anabaptist movement is no exception to this truth.

Throughout its over 460-years-history it has been shaped by migrations, contacts with other religious movements, persecutions, poverty and prosperity, and has undergone a variety of modifications, deviations from the original principles, and even complete transformation.

What were the main convictions of the early Anabaptists?

The Word of God

Neither the Swiss nor the Dutch Anabaptists developed a clear system of theology. Their guide was the Bible; their standard for faith and Christian living was derived from Scripture. "What is not taught by plain and clear Scripture or illustrated by the example of Christ or the apostles, is to be reckoned as anathema."³ The Word of God was interpreted literally. There were a few learned teachers among the early Anabaptists to assist in expounding Scripture. They relied fully on the presence of the Holy Spirit to explain the wisdom of God.⁴

Menno Simons became a believer through the reading of the New Testament, and throughout his life took the Bible as his exclusive authority. He was a biblicist in the true sense. All his writings were introduced with, "For other foundation can no one lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11).⁵

Conversion

The Anabaptists spoke of spiritual regeneration or new birth simply as an acceptance by faith of Christ's salvation. The joy of spiritual rebirth displaced the culpability of his former life,⁶ and assurance of God's forgiveness left no room for debilitating guilt feelings. Regeneration was an irrevocable decision to follow Christ. The new life was not merely a joyful assurance of being saved from damnation, but an unqualified obligation to obey explicitly the Word of God.⁷

He knew well that a child of God can still sin, but his focus must be on "walking in the newness of life" (Rom. 6:4) rather than being overly engaged in rear guard action. He accepted the truth that every believer must first "die with Christ" in order "to live with Him."⁸

Baptism and the Lord's Supper

To the Anabaptists baptism was a symbol of death to sin and a new life with Christ (Rom. 6), a public proclamation of discipleship, a sincere covenant with God, and a promise to be a true disciple.⁹ It was "a pledge of a good conscience" (1 Peter 3:21) to obey the guidance of the Lord.

Baptism was administered only to believing adults who would commit themselves to the discipline of the church, which meant accepting responsibility to admonish others and consenting to be admonished.¹⁰

The mode of baptism itself seemed of no essential consequence. A few were immersed, others were "poured" with a handful of water, most were "sprinkled."

Baptism and the Lord's Supper were not sacraments, but spiritual symbols. The Anabaptists did not accept transubstantiation, the teaching that the bread and wine were turned into the body and blood of Christ by the blessing of the priest. To them, communion symbolized consummate fellowship with God and other believers, and a relinquishing of personal desires for the joy of identifying with Christ and his church.¹¹

Discipleship

The great word of the Anabaptists was not "faith" but *Nachfolge* discipleship.¹² Faith's sincerity was proved by deeds. Faith must be tested (1 Peter 1:7): and the Apostle's exhortation "Fight the good fight of faith" (1 Tim. 6:12) meant a constant emphasis on the daily walk and separation from the world (2 Cor. 6:17).

The example of Jesus and the admonitions of the apostles were the determining factors, and if the Christian walk led to the "cross," they willingly accepted that (2 Tim. 3:12).

Sebastian Frank, an opponent of the Anabaptists, candidly admitted, "The Anabaptists. . . soon gained a large following. . . drawing many sincere souls who had a zeal for God, for they taught nothing but love, faith, and the cross. They showed themselves humble, patient under suffering; they brake bread with one another as an evidence of unity and love. They helped each other faithfully, and called each other brothers. . . They died as martyrs, patiently and humbly enduring all persecution."¹³

In the eventuality of backsliding the church would admonish and warn, and if correction was refused, banning followed. Banning was often emphasized by avoidance. But there was always an open door for return.¹⁴

Sharing the Faith

It was not only the joy of their new-found faith which made Anabaptists spread the good news wherever they went. They also took seriously the injunction of Christ to go and teach the world. "The Anabaptists were the first to make the commission binding upon all church members."¹⁵ So actively did many obey this charge that opponents slandered them with "*Taeufer sind Laeufer*" (Baptists are runners as much as to say, "they run around talking to people instead of staying home to work"). The Anabaptist goal of spreading the gospel was "to change the world."¹⁶

The Anabaptist movement originated in cities and towns, but after a few years (perhaps because of persecution) realized its greatest success among the peasant folk of Central Europe. Holland was an exception.

Nonresistance

The Anabaptists completely repudiated any participation in warfare, strife and violence, and the taking of human life. Vengeance was not tolerated by true believers.¹⁷

Menno Simons stated, "These regenerated people. . . are the children of

peace who have beaten their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, and know war no more."¹⁸ This conviction came from the life of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. "His Kingdom is the kingdom of peace, which is the church;" Menno proclaimed eloquently, "His messengers are the messengers of peace; His word is the word of peace; his body is the body of peace; His children are the seed of peace; and His inheritance and reward are the inheritance and the reward of peace."¹⁹

Going to war was simply inconsistent with faith in Christ, and a member who did not comply with these standards was expected to remove himself voluntarily from the fellowship.

The Church

The church was a voluntary fellowship of regenerated men and women and of vital importance in the life of the believer. It was a community of the redeemed those who realized their sinful state, repented of it, accepted Christ's salvation in faith, were baptized upon their confession of faith, and established the genuineness of their discipleship by their daily walk.²⁰

The church was a brotherhood — the body of Christ. The brotherhood concept showed itself in the mutual responsibility of members for each other, in loving readiness to learn from others, in quietly accepting the decisions of the whole body, in sharing of their material goods with the needy.²¹

Such a church was part of the Kingdom of God "whose core idea was: withdrawal from the world, eschatological readiness and above all an awareness of a good conscience toward God." All this was tacitly understood and accepted.²²

Menno wrote of the true signs by which the church of Christ may be known:

1. An unadulterated, pure doctrine
2. Scriptural use of the sacramental signs
3. Obedience to the Word
4. Unfeigned brotherly love
5. A bold confession of God and Christ
6. Oppression and tribulation for the sake of the Lord's Word.²³

Because of these principles, the church must be completely separated from the state. The Anabaptists accepted the state as ordained of God, and therefore, to be obeyed in all things, except in such that conflicted with their conscience. Since the state wanted uniformity of belief, and persecuted those who disagreed with the state church, Anabaptists would not, "for conscience sake," accept any office in the magistracy. They insisted on religious freedom and freedom of conscience.²⁴

Mennonites in Prussia

During the intense persecution of Anabaptists (Mennonites) in Holland, many fled their homeland in search of tolerance. They found it in the Vistula Delta area of Poland, later part of Prussia. Here they were allowed to acquire land, much of which they had to drain before it was usable. Having learned

dyking and draining in Holland, they could do what others had avoided. In time they became very prosperous. Both Frederick I and Frederick II, kings of Prussia, tolerated the Mennonites, although requiring exorbitant sums of money for the exemption of the young men from military service. Toward the last quarter of the eighteenth century the Mennonites were limited in the acquisition of new land. Many of the younger men, of necessity, became tradespeople. After the death of Frederick II oppressive measures intensified, and when lucrative offers of settlement came from Russia, many were again ready to move.

Mennonites in Russia

In 1789, 228 families arrived in the Ukraine, and during the next seventy years almost 10,000 Mennonites moved from Prussia to Russia. They established four colonies: Chortitza in 1789, Molotschna in 1804, Trakt in 1853, and Samara in 1859.

It took many hard years before these colonies began to prosper. The privileges they received from the Russian Czar were conducive to great development: exemption from military service "for all eternity", 175 acres of land for every householder, settlement in contiguous villages, their own administration in the villages and colony, and control over schools.

The same problem they experienced in Prussia soon arose here. The succeeding generation required land, but according to Russian law the householder was not allowed to divide his 175 acres to provide land for his sons. Eventually, after loud complaints and repressed resentments, the householders united to buy land for their children. The first purchase was made by the Chortitza colony 37,000 acres on which five villages were established. This daughter colony was named Berghthal. A few years later another colony, known as Fuerstenland, was established on a tract of land acquired from a nobleman. The Molotschna colony followed suit and bought land for its young people. By 1914 some 50 new settlements had been established by the original four mother colonies; altogether they comprised about 365 villages and over four million acres of land.²⁵

Although the Mennonites advanced well in agriculture and education, their spiritual development lagged. The first settlers to Russia had come without a minister; they were preoccupied with making a living; they lost the biblical concept of a church with only true Christians as members. Many years later Bernhard Harder, a minister, evangelist, and poet, wrote to the editor of the *Mennonitische Blaetter* (July 28, 1862) ". . . we are left with a dry form with a husk lacking the seed, with a church lacking living members."²⁶ The spiritual decline had tragic results, and, according to J.A. Toews, revealed itself in "the lack of church nurture and discipline, in serious tensions and tragic schisms, and in the loss of Christian virtues."²⁷

The desire for renewal was still alive in several ministers and in many people, however. During 1812-19 a group of discontented members under the leadership of Klaas Reimer, a minister, gathered in homes for Bible study, and the reading of Menno Simon's writings, Dirk Philip's works, and the

Martyrs' Mirror. They tried "to return to early Anabaptist principles and practices."²⁸ This group organized its own church and became known as the "*Kleine Gemeinde*"²⁹ (small church) in contrast to the large one from which they seceded. Says P.M. Friesen, "The *Kleine Gemeinde* was a messenger calling the Molotschna Mennonites to repentance." Later, in the 1870s the *Kleine Gemeinde* immigrated as a whole to North America.³⁰

In the villages of Orloff and Gnadenfeld a number of sincere men strove for the improvement of education and the purification of the church. Orloff became a center of renewal in matters of culture and education, and Gnadenfeld in the religious life of the Russian Mennonites, as home of a pietistic awakening.

Hofacker's Sermons, a book of evangelistic messages, was "an important means of promoting revival in the Molotschna Colony. Many ministers read them from the pulpit with great edification for the listeners."³¹

Perhaps the greatest influence for revival came from Eduard Wuest, a Lutheran minister from Neu-Hoffnung. His dynamic messages at missionary meetings in Gnadenfeld (Molotschna), and his Bible expositions at the Saturday study gatherings of interested Mennonites, were instrumental in awakening many to new spiritual life.³² J.A. Toews writes, "Wuest was a Moses who had led many people out of the bondage of a lifeless tradition and orthodoxy to a joyous assurance of a personal faith."³³

The Founding of the Mennonite Brethren Church

After the death of Wuest in 1859 the brethren who had been awakened by his dynamic preaching and had found assurance of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, continued with the study of Scriptures. They asked Elder Lenzmann of Gnadenfeld to administer communion to their particular group in a home. Upon his refusal, they observed the ordinance among themselves. Subsequently several of them were banned and the others walked out in the midst of a stormy church meeting. The church lost approximately twenty-five members. Abraham Kornelsen, a school teacher, was then asked by this group to write "a letter of secession." On January 6, 1860 they met in the home of Isaak Koop in Elisabethal, and prayerfully discussed the Secession Document. Fully aware of the dire consequences, eighteen "brethren" signed the historic document.³⁴ It stated the causes for the formation of the Mennonite Brethren Church, and the doctrinal position on some of the crucial and controversial issues of the day.³⁵

Acceptance of the Mennonite Brethren Church by the larger Mennonite brotherhood was a slow process. The opposition in the beginning was acrimonious to the point of persecution, but eventually the MBs were recognized by the government as a valid Mennonite church and the general attitude of the brotherhood gradually changed.

Emigration from Russia

The 1870s were momentous years for the Mennonites in Russia. The Czar, influenced by the military ferment in Europe, the spread of democracy, and

the Russian nobles who feared erosion of their feudal power, introduced laws directed toward the Russification of all foreign colonists. Universal military service and the use of the Russian language in civic offices and schools was to be initiated. These laws violated the privileges granted to the Mennonites by Catherine II and confirmed by Czar Paul and brought the Mennonites into great turmoil. Conferences were called, letters written to the government, delegations sent to the Czar and high officials in St. Petersburg. But, all to no avail. Many began to consider emigration, and a delegation was sent to North America to investigate the availability of suitable land and possible privileges. The delegation returned with glowing reports.

The first emigrants left in 1874, and during 1874-80 approximately 18,000 followed to North America: more than 10,000 to the U.S.A. and 7,383 to Manitoba. About 30 percent of the Mennonites of the Ukraine emigrated.³⁶

Notes on Chapter 1

1. Estep, William R. *The Anabaptist Story*. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1963), p. 10.
2. Smith, C. Henry. *The Story of the Mennonites*. Revised and enlarged by C. Krahn, (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1981), p. 8.
3. Waltner, Erland quoting H.S. Bender. "Anabaptist Concept of the Church," *Mennonite Life*. October, 1950.
4. Friedman, Robert. *The Theology of Anabaptism*. (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1973), p. 20.
5. *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Second printing 1969. "Menno Simons" by C. Krahn, Vol. III, p. 582.
6. *The Theology of Anabaptism*. p. 78.
7. Friedman, Robert. *Mennonite Piety Through the Centuries*. (Sugar Creek, OH: Schabach Printers, 1980), p. 73.
8. Hershberger, Guy F. ed. *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1957), p. 39.
9. *Mennonite Piety Through the Centuries*. p. 73.
10. Klaassen, Walter *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic nor Protestant*. (Waterloo, ON: Conrad Press, 1976), p. 17.
11. *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Second Printing 1969. "The Lord's Supper" by Robert Friedman, vol. III, p. 394.
12. *Recovery*. p. 43.
13. *Recovery*. p. 46.
14. *Mennonite Piety*. p. 125.
15. Waltner, Erland quoting Franklin H. Kittel. "Anabaptist Concept of the Church" *Mennonite Quarterly Review*. Jan., 1951.
16. *Mennonite Piety Through the Centuries*, p. 73.
17. *The Recovery*. p. 51.
18. *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*. Translated by Leonard Verduin and edited by John Wenger (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 3rd printing, 1974), p. 94.
19. *Menno Simons*. p. 554.

20. *The Recovery*. p. 47.
21. Waltner, Erland. "Anabaptist Concept of the Church," *Mennonite Life*. October, 1950.
22. *The Theology of Anabaptism*. p. 51.
23. *Menno Simons*. p. 94.
24. Bender, Harold. "Introduction," *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*. p. 29.
25. Epp, Frank. *Mennonite Exodus*. (D.W. Friesen, Altona, MB, 1962), p. 19.
26. Friesen P.M. *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia*. Translated by the Board of Christian Literature of the General Conference of the M.B. Churches, (Winnipeg, MB: Christian Press, 1978), pp. 252-253.
27. Toews, John A. *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*. (Hillsboro, KS: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches of North America, 1975), pp. 22-24.
28. *History*. p. 26.
29. "Kleine Gemeinde" (small church, so called because only a small fraction of the large church seceded). Since 1952, here in Manitoba, the official name is "Evangelical Mennonite Church."
30. *Mennonite Brotherhood*. p. 93.
31. *Mennonite Brotherhood*. Footnote 88, p. 1004.
32. *Mennonite Encyclopedia*. "Eduard Wuest" by Cornelius Krahn, vol IV p. 997.
33. *History*. p. 31.
34. *History*. pp. 33-34.
35. *History*. pp. 35-36.
36. Francis, E.K. *In Search of Utopia*. (Altona, MB: D.W. Friesen, 1955), p. 28.

Chapter 2

MANITOBA MENNONITES OF 1874-1900

Within three years (1874-76) all of the Bergthal Colony, many of the people of Fuerstenland (both were daughter colonies of Chortitza), and the Kleine Gemeinde from Borsenko had immigrated to Manitoba. All, except for the Kleine Gemeinde, belonged to the same Mennonite church. In these groups there were no Mennonite Brethren members.

The Canadian Government gave the Manitoba immigrants generous privileges, such as:

- exemption from military service in peace and war
- allotment of 160 acres to the head of the family or to one who was twenty-one years of age, with the permission to buy the other 3/4 section for one dollar an acre
- freedom of exercising their religious principles "without molestation or restriction whatsoever," and the same privileges extended to the education of their children in their own schools

- exemption from swearing an oath in legal proceedings.¹

These magnanimous privileges were granted because the government desired to settle the prairies with reputable farmers in order to counteract the restlessness of the Metis and to prevent the United States from claiming this territory.²

The Mennonites settled on eight townships about thirty-five miles east of Winnipeg, which became known as the East Reserve (the present Hanover municipality). They formed villages as they had done in Russia and established their own administrative council of which the ministering elder was an important part.

Settlement in contiguous farmsteads in villages made possible strict religious control of the community.³

The pioneer years were difficult. Drought and grasshoppers wreaked havoc on their first crops. These good farmers very soon discovered that their soil in many places was poor. Yet Manitoba's governor-general, Lord Dufferin, had great hopes for them. Visiting them in 1877, barely three years

after their settlement, he was wonderfully impressed and publicly related in somewhat exaggerated terms his observations and the promise of the Mennonite settlements.⁴

In spite of these prospects many who could afford it moved west of the Red River to the "West Reserve" which subsequently was also assigned to the Mennonites. It consisted of approximately seventeen townships. Other Mennonites, arriving in 1875 and later, also moved to the West Reserve.

The bare prairie west of the Red River, which had been avoided by other settlers, was suddenly alive with activity. These new settlers were eager to establish themselves and they worked hard. In a short time they made the prairie bloom. J.F. Galbraith, editor of the *Morden Chronicle*, was just as exuberant in his praise of the settlement as Lord Dufferin had been of the East Reserve:

"By 1880 Mennonites were financially well established. Every village had a fine herd of cattle, the oxen were replaced by horses and cultivation of land was extended. . . . In summer the Mennonite villages are gems of sylvan beauty. . . . The landscape is a view of rural loveliness. . . . Undoubtedly the Mennonites are the best foreign colonists that ever came to Canada."⁵

The first difficult pioneer years were not conducive to rapid educational and cultural development, yet, as throughout the history of the Mennonites, churches and schools were built as soon as possible. There were a few educated teachers among them, but every winter someone was given the job of teaching (usually one who for some reason could not farm, but who could read and write). There were really very few illiterates among the immigrants. Most could read the Bible and the hymnbook. Beyond these, few books were found in their homes. Many subscribed to German family papers.

These Mennonites were people of deep religious convictions. Coming to Manitoba, they had hoped to establish an island of religious isolation, away from every worldly influence. Membership in the church was the protective wall against the encroachment of the world. To belong to the brotherhood and to marry within it, one had to be baptized; baptism was administered upon being able to recite the catechism. The catechism was an admirable attempt to state Anabaptist doctrine in concise form. The tragedy was that one could learn it mechanically without truly accepting its principles, or without a definite commitment to follow Jesus Christ. Unfortunately baptism was often little more than a decision to comply with church regulations. To be sure, many catechumens were utterly sincere in their confession of faith, though perhaps not understanding all the implications of true discipleship. And, many of the ministers were consummately honest in teaching and leading their flock in definite action against the influence of the world. This emphasis tended to overshadow the aspect of the believer's joyful walk with Jesus Christ.

Elder Gerhard Wiebe, the leader of the first contingent of immigrants, for example, wished to protect his people, and keep them from the contamination of the world. In giving them rules to live by, he required a commitment to the church; commitment to the person of Christ seemed to get less direct em-

phasis.⁶ The word "conversion" was not used.

Within a few years Mennonites were scattered from Old Dawson Road to the Pembina Hills of Manitoba. It was a formidable task to minister to the churches and individual members because of the difficulties of transportation. The Bergthal people of the West Reserve had no elder of their own, and depended on Elder G. Wiebe, who lived in the East Reserve. The West felt neglected. Also among these people were many who had been banned from the church for not obeying the strict rules. The church body was not united.

In 1880, in an attempt to stem the deterioration of the church life, the western settlers, who lived close to the Pembina Hills, and who were almost exclusively from the Fuerstenland Colony in Russia, organized themselves into the Reinland Mennonite Church. Officially, this is still the name, but popularly it is known as the "Old Colony Church" to the present day.⁷

Seven years later, to provide more spiritual nurture for the Bergthaler, Elder G. Wiebe ordained Johann Funk as elder for the West Reserve.⁸ Elder Funk tried to gather the Bergthal people into a homogeneous group. He was a progressive man and particularly supported the improvement of education. He was, however, opposed by many ultra-conservatives. These, a few years later, asked Elder Wiebe to ordain another elder with whom they would be more in agreement. Abraham Doerksen was chosen and most of the Bergthaler followed him. Because he lived in the village of Sommerfeld, this church became known as the Sommerfeld Mennonite Church. Elder Funk was left with a decimated Bergthaler Mennonite Church.⁹

Religiously and administratively the elders and ministers were losing their strong hold in the Mennonite communities. The new world beckoned with freedom for those who chafed under the rigid supervision of the elders. The Canadian system of holding land contributed as well. Many Mennonites were moving away from the villages and onto their own quarter section. Of sixty-two villages in the 1870s only eighteen remained by 1900. The Municipal Act eroded the power of the village administration. Instead of the villages, wards became the units of administration. Public elections of a reeve and councillors ran diametrically counter to the village management system. Although this was acceptable to many Bergthaler, the Fuerstenlaender put up a strenuous struggle against any innovations and did not permit their people to take part in elections. Many who did not obey were banned, and these generally would join the more progressive Bergthaler church.¹⁰

The railway built through Winkler and from Rosenfeld to Gretna (1892), accelerated contact with the rest of Manitoba. Then the Department of Education introduced an English curriculum "a worldly English curriculum," some Mennonites said for all public schools. All these innovations had a devastating effect upon the church. Writes Gerbrandt in *Adventure in Faith*, "It was only natural that this would result in a general breakdown of morals and integrity. Church attendance dropped to a dangerous low. Drunkenness, immorality, rape, theft, revelry and related vices made deep inroads into village life. . . . By 1890 a number of men had already joined lodges. Letters in Mennonite papers, like the '*Mennonitische Rundschau*,' '*Herold der Wahrheit*,'

and 'Der Bundesbote' repeatedly dealt with the breakdown. The Morden courts had to deal with many cases. Even ministers were tried for various offenses. The light that had shone forth promisingly during the feverish preparation in Russia, began to flicker lower and lower. Neither spiritual, educational nor civic leadership was prepared to cope with this situation. A new concept of freedom was destroying a Mennonite community."¹¹

Still, there were laudable exceptions. Men like Johann Funk, Wilhelm Rempel, Heinrich H. Ewert, Jakob Hoepfner, and many lay church members prayed for renewal. They longed for a deeper spiritual life. A few dared to start Bible study groups and began to sing gospel songs, even in harmonic parts, which was considered an inexorable sin.

Notes Chapter 2

1. Manitoba Provincial Archives, *Letter* signed by J.H. Pope, Minister of Agriculture, July 28, 1873.

2. Gerbrandt, H.J. *Adventure in Faith*. (Altona, MB: D.W. Friesen & Sons, 1970), p. 73.

3. Francis, E.K. *In Search of Utopia*. (Altona, MB: D.W. Friesen & Sons, 1955), p.62.

4. *Utopia*. p. 79.

5. Galbraith, J.F. "Mennonites in Manitoba 1875-1900" in the *Morden Chronicle*. (A review of their Coming, their Progress, and their Present Prosperity).

6. Wiebe, Gerhard. *Causes and History of the Emigration of the Mennonites from Russia to Canada*. Translated by Helen Janzen (Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 1981).

7. *Adventure*. p.75.

8. *Adventure*. p.81.

9. *Adventure*. p.90.

10. *Utopia*. p.161.

11. *Adventure*. pp.76-77.

Chapter 3

THE EARLY YEARS OF THE MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES

The primary reason for the emigration of 18,000 Mennonites from Russia was to avoid military service, imposed upon them by the Czar's ukase (decree) in the early 1870s.¹ There were also economic reasons. Many of the emigrants were landless and simply sought better opportunities in what was considered a land of limitless possibilities. More than 10,000 chose to emigrate to the U.S.A. rather than Canada because of a more favorable climate, even though promises of special privileges were not forthcoming. They were to be treated like any other immigrants, given the same rights and the same responsibilities. Concerning non-resistance, they were persuaded that the U.S. had not had conscription in the past and it was not likely to have it in the future. (The first conscription happened in 1917 during the First World War), and individual states would certainly offer the Mennonites kind consideration.

Mennonites from European countries had settled in the U.S. earlier, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They were of Dutch, German, and Swiss origins. These were very helpful to the new immigrants from Russia by collecting gifts, obtaining favourable railway passes, and helping find suitable land areas. "The ultimate success of the whole venture must be attributed, next to God's gracious, overruling providence; to the wise and dedicated leadership of these men" (referring to John F. Funk, Elkhart, Ind., editor of *Der Herold der Wahrheit*, and Christian Krehbiel of Summerfield, Illinois).²

The 10,000 Mennonite immigrants of 1874-80 settled in the prairie states: Kansas, Nebraska, the Dakotas, and Minnesota. Among them were small groups of Mennonite Brethren. The MBs came from the Molotschna, Chortitza, Kuban, Volga River, and Don River areas. Each group brought with it its

own particular worship customs which created severe tensions in the work of becoming a homogeneous church body. Because of irreconcilable differences quite a few members joined the Baptists or the Adventists.³

The Mennonite Brethren scattered over the prairies, gathered in homes for worship. Some of the groups remained small for many years; some dissolved, its members moving to areas of greater promise. Generally they lacked vital leadership, for there were few ministers among them. Many groups did not organize into churches until years after settlement. The Ebenfeld MB Church was first organized in 1874. The coming of Elder Abraham Schellenberg of Rueckenau, Russia, with a small group of immigrants, stabilized matters.

In 1879 the churches from the different states met together to organize an MB Conference. At this gathering they adopted the 1873 Confession of Faith (except for the appendix which explained the differences between the Mennonite Brethren Church and other churches) and decided to proceed according to the principles laid down by the MB Church in Russia.⁴ Later the 1902 Confession of Faith, revised by the Russian MB brethren, was fully accepted.

From the very beginning the dominant characteristics of these churches were their sincere desire for fellowship, a deeper knowledge of the Bible, and obedience to Christ's command to carry the gospel to all people. At the conventions they also had "love feasts" (*Liebesmahl*) joyous fellowship gatherings, mission festivals, and inspirational preaching. In the business sessions they would try to clarify doctrinal and ethical questions. Most of the time was spent on "home missions," the ministry to their own scattered churches, and how to support it. The preachers were each assigned places of visitation. All groups were considered, regardless of size or location. These visitations, more than any method attempted, effectively united the churches. The ministers, according to the gifts the Holy Spirit had given them, would evangelize or nurture the spiritual life of the church. Many members were added.

Because of Christ's command in Matthew 28:19, the missionary responsibility had high priority. It is not surprising, therefore, that at the 1882 convention, although the American MB churches were only a few years old, mention was made that they should consider extending their missionary efforts to other countries.

Notes Chapter 3

Information for this chapter from

- *General Conference Minutes* 1880-1919
- *The Mennonite Brethren Church* by John H. Lorenz
- *Die Geschichte der Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde* by A.H. Unruh
- *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* by John A. Toews
- *The Story of the Mennonites* by C. Henry Smith

1. Toews, John A. *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*. (Hillsboro, KS: Board of Christian Literature of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1975), p. 130.

2. *History*. p. 130.

3. *History*. p. 138.

4. Unruh, A.H. *Die Geschichte der Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde*. (Winnipeg, MB: The Christian Press, 1954), p. 419.

PART II

ENLARGE THE PLACE OF
YOUR TENT
(Is. 54:2)

Chapter 4

THE FIRST MISSIONARY VENTURE

A. The American Mennonite Brethren Concern

At the Mennonite Brethren conference in 1883, held in Hamilton County, Nebraska, delegates expressed concern about the spiritual condition of the Mennonite church in Manitoba and wondered whether they had a responsibility to help. These concerned men had relatives in Manitoba. Johann Harms moved "that we send Heinrich Voth of Minnesota with David Dyck of Kansas to Manitoba to investigate the feasibility of beginning a missionary work there." This motion was carried. The cost of the trip was to be borne by the conference.¹

This was a momentous decision for it changed the religious life of many in southern Manitoba, and had extensive effects for years to come. The decision was made not merely to extend MB influence, but was born out of a genuine concern for the salvation of loved ones and friends. It was the first outreach effort of the U.S. Mennonite Brethren Church beyond its borders.

Heinrich Voth was chosen because he was a faithful witness of the love of God and because he lived just south of Manitoba. David Dyck was a successful evangelist and already had friendly contact with Mennonites in Manitoba, for his wife's parents lived there.

Conferences make decisions but it is individual faithfulness and resourcefulness that assures success of assigned tasks. It is people of vision who, in the providence of God, change the course of history. Let us look more closely into the life of one of these people, Heinrich Voth, whose ministry of church extension inaugurated the Mennonite Brethren Church of Manitoba.

B. Heinrich Voth

Heinrich Voth was a man of God. His love for God, his unshakeable reliance upon the power of God, his perseverance, his stubbornness, his ready witness, his genial way of approaching people with questions of eternal import, and his willingness to suffer were characteristics that brought spiritual



Heinrich Voth

changes to southern Manitoba.

Voth was born in Gnadenheim, South Russia on February 19, 1851. He received a good education and was a teacher for two years in Klippenfeld. He married Sarah Kornelsen in 1873. His persistent search for truth in the Word of God brought him to the point where he humbly accepted salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Soon afterwards, his wife also experienced forgiveness of sins. Joyfully, Heinrich began to witness in school, showing his pupils the way of reconciliation with God. The frank and fearless testimony resulted in termination of his contract with the school. In 1876 the young

family immigrated to the U.S.A., where they settled on a 40-acre farm in the Mountain Lake, Minnesota area.

There were only a few Mennonite families that had come as far as Minnesota. The little group had no minister, but gathered regularly in homes for Bible study. A few of the families were Mennonite Brethren. They asked for help from the large church in Ebenfeld, Kansas. Elder A. Schellenberg, unable to come himself, authorized a lay brother, Peter Martens, to baptize. In 1877 Heinrich and Sarah were baptized by immersion and accepted as members in the Mennonite Brethren Church.

Already at his baptism, Heinrich revealed his determination. He had asked his father for a wagon and horses to travel to the lake where the baptism was to take place. As his father strongly opposed the son's baptism, he refused. Undaunted, Heinrich and Sarah set out on foot. When his father became aware of it, he relented and sent his younger son with the wagon to take the couple to the lake.

Since there was no leader, certain disagreements as to the correct procedure ensued at the water, and it seemed that discord would break up the baptism. Heinrich, convinced by the Holy Spirit that he should proceed, took his wife by the hand and with singing, entered the water. This quickly resolved the disagreement and they were baptized. Here, as often in his life, Voth's courageous and determined action removed crippling hindrances.

A few weeks after the baptism Voth was elected as the minister of the little group. He faithfully served this church for forty-two years. In 1885 he was ordained as elder of the church. He became a beloved evangelist in the U.S. and Canada, and a respected Bible teacher and conference leader.²

Heinrich Voth held firmly to the principle of non-resistance and brought up his children in the same spirit. In 1918 he moved to Canada to avoid having his younger sons drafted into the army. In Canada they could receive conscientious objector status.

The new start in Vanderhoof, B.C. taxed his weakened constitution to the

utmost, yet he continued to preach and visit people. He died November 26, 1918 and was buried in Vanderhoof. Shortly after that, since most of the Mennonites left Vanderhoof because of economic difficulties, Voth's son, Henry S. Voth, exhumed the body and buried it in Winkler, Manitoba.

The missionary efforts of Heinrich Voth

Heinrich Voth was 33 when he began his missionary venture in Manitoba. The first trip was made in 1884 with David Dyck, five years his senior. The two men visited the parents-in-law of David Dyck and many others. Since they were interested in the spiritual convictions of people, they found a few who had assurance of forgiveness and others who were searching for peace.

Johann Warkentin, the leader of the Winkler Mennonite Brethren Church, describes the coming of the brethren: "It was June 1884, when I opened the window of the school of Hoffnungsfield where I was teaching, to allow fresh air to enter. A wagon passed by with two men in white shirts sitting in the back seat. This was somewhat strange. . . . The men were sent because it was known that Manitoba had a large Mennonite settlement and few converted people. . . . They had held a service in Burwalde. . . . Their coming created some disturbance. It was so new these men wanted to know whether people were believers. . . ."³

That same year in December Heinrich Voth came to Manitoba again, this time without David Dyck who had other commitments. Again, people were puzzled. "What does this strange man want?" J. Warkentin continues: "He did not ask about wheat, barley or oats, but inquired about the health of the soul. This language they did not understand. They eventually had the idea to go with him to the teacher."⁴ Here H. Voth asked whether he could have a service. Since using the school required the permission of the village administrator, and would likely be refused, Jacob Wiens, a believer, offered his house for a service. J. Warkentin reported: "There was quite a large attendance, mostly young people. Brother Voth spoke about the coming of Jesus to earth. I myself was very happy and I thought that all who had come were just as happy. But instead of joy and blessing a storm of indignation arose. Some thought such people should be chased out of the village with dogs. . . ."⁵

In spite of the general opposition there were people who had been blessed and appreciated Voth's concern. And the good seed sprouted. People met for Bible study. The following spring Voth came again. People were converted and although there were only a few bold enough to reveal their new-found joy, there were many who longed for peace of heart. To the many inquiries about the purpose of his coming, Voth answered, "My work is to reconcile people to God."⁶

Opposition

Voth's ministry was not without opposition. The ministers of the Mennonite church unanimously decided not to permit Voth to speak in their schools. At one service, held at Abram Kroeker's home, the village mayor

and two councillors entered, intending to seize Voth and send him home. J. Warkentin went to meet them, and since there were no empty seats in the audience, he invited them to sit behind the speaker. When they left the service, one of them asked the other, "Why did you not take him? You said you would." His hesitant answer was, "If that, what the man preached, is true, we are all lost." This man later surrendered to the Lord and became a staunch supporter of Voth.⁷

Another time Voth was walking from one village to another. A young man on horseback galloped after him and vigorously lashed Voth's back with his whip. Voth continued on his way without speaking, turning around, or accelerating his pace. Since there was no reaction, the culprit desisted and rode off.⁸

Coming into a village late one day, Voth requested night lodging but was refused. It was winter; the cold Manitoba night pressed hard upon him. He wondered where to go. The next village was miles away. Prayerfully he looked for shelter. He found a straw stack, burrowed into it and spent the night praying. Graciously God protected him.⁹

Voth's reaction to opposition was expressed in a letter to his friend David Dyck: "A long dark year lies behind me, and I experienced many depressing times. . . . When I think of the many sacrifices Manitoba has required, and of the expectations the brothers and sisters (the MB Conference) have, I always enter into an intense struggle."¹⁰

Again that same year he wrote to his friends: "That Satan is very busy when the Lord begins to build his kingdom. . . . we know from experience. He tries to put the church into an unfavourable light and if he does not succeed, he will even go into the river, be baptized because that is the only door into the church and root up the soil. I feel weak, but I am determined to continue to work and look to God for help. . . . The Lord will build his church, but there are many adversaries."¹¹

Voth happily related the following episode to Dyck: "In Osterwick I stayed with P. Giesbrecht for the night. Before going to bed I read God's Word and prayed with them. During the night I heard children crying, and when I was fully awake, I became aware that the mother had fainted. When she recovered, she prayed to the Lord until peace entered her heart. Happy hours! When we met in the morning, she excused herself that likely she had disturbed me. I assured her that I would gladly be disturbed like that every night."¹²

A number of people had for some time wrestled with the question of baptism upon a personal faith in Jesus Christ. This was a difficult problem, since all married people had been baptized in one of the Mennonite churches. Rebaptism meant a break with tradition, implying that the earlier baptism was invalid. It sometimes meant severing relationships with parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends. It could mean the disapproval of loved ones, the feared ban of the church, and complete "avoidance" by all. Johann Warkentin compared it to the situation of the Anabaptists in the time of Menno Simons.¹³ Rebaptism unquestionably involved emotional upheaval.

It took until May, 1886 before Jacob and Anna Banman and John Nickel and his wife were baptized by Brother Voth. Two weeks later two more took this step. In his letters Voth mentions names of a few more who wanted to be baptized but were hindered by their families. Even Johann Warkentin, described by Voth as "a worthy soul, precious as gold,"¹⁴ waited until 1890 before he and his wife accepted believer's baptism.

Voth told of a case where the angry parents of a couple that was baptized took their grandchildren away and kept them for four days, then chased them home and disinherited their children. At that baptism Voth was to have been whipped, but the Lord held his protective hand over him.

Voth wrote, "It is a matter of life and death. I have felt quite insecure at times. Dear brother, I do not want to die before I see how the Lord will build his kingdom in Manitoba and direct it into an orderly course. . . . This was my most difficult trip. I have wept much alone."¹⁵ He often found a lonely spot in the field or bush and agonized for hours in prayer.

Voth also experienced joys, when, for instance, he noticed that the newly baptized would pray aloud and say grace before meals "standing up." Such things were unheard of in that area. "On the 23rd of December we had a meeting," he related. "All the brethren and sisters were present. . . . I was very happy for we were eight altogether: our loving Redeemer, the Johann Nickels, the Jacob Banmans, Peter Hoepfner, Mrs. H. Hoepfner and I. Again we had intimate fellowship and because we loved one another, and wanted to continue to battle against the world and sin, and be faithful to our Lord, we partook of the Lord's Supper and footwashing. We were very happy."¹⁶

Voth's report of the baptisms to the U.S. Mennonite Brethren convention caused great rejoicing and he was asked to continue his efforts. The conference paid his expenses. He had previously urged the convention to move David Dyck to Manitoba to establish the work. The young converts needed strengthening in their faith, solid grounding in the Word of God, and directives for ethical behaviour. Again and again Voth appealed to David Dyck in his letters to come to Manitoba. But Dyck had a large family and could not see his way through to moving.

Eventually Voth wrote Gerhard Wiebe, a minister and teacher in Russia and a member of the Mennonite Brethren church. Voth had heard very good reports of him. Since Wiebe intended to emigrate, Voth suggested that he choose Manitoba, for there he would also find wonderful opportunities to work for the Lord.

In 1888 Gerhard Wiebe arrived in Manitoba with a small group of other Mennonite Brethren.¹⁷

Notes Chapter 4

1. *Minutes*. The U.S. Mennonite Brethren Conference held at Hamilton County, Nebraska, Nov.12, 1883.

2. Lohrenz, J.H. *The Mennonite Brethren Church*. (Hillsboro, KS: Board of Foreign Missions, Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, 1950). *Recollections* of Mrs. Sara Klippenstein, granddaughter of Heinrich Voth; and *Diary* of Peter Neufeld, grandson of Heinrich Voth.

3. Warkentin, Johann. *Die Entstehung der Bruedergemeinde in Manitoba; Aufzeichnungen*

4. *Die Entstehung*.

5. *Die Entstehung*.

6. *Die Entstehung*.

7. Voth, Heinrich. *Letter* to David Dyck, Dec. 20, 1885.

8. Brown, Frank. *Mennonite Brethren Church, Winkler, MB, 1888-1963, 75th Anniversary Issue*. (Altona, MB: D.W. Friesen & Sons, Ltd, 1963).

9. As told by H. Voth's wife to J.B.Toews, Fresno, CA.

10. Voth, Heinrich. *Letter* to David Dyck, Sept. 1, 1885.

11. Voth, Heinrich. *Letter* to David Dyck, April 23, 1885.

12. Voth, Heinrich. *Letter* to David Dyck, Feb. 10, 1885.

13. *Die Entstehung*.

14. *Die Entstehung*.

15. Voth, Heinrich. *Letter* to David Dyck, July 19, 1887.

16. Voth, Heinrich. *Letter* to David Dyck, Jan. 18, 1887.

17. *Die Entstehung*.

Chapter 5

THE FIRST MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCHES IN MANITOBA



Burwalde Church. The small building is the first Mennonite Brethren Church in Canada

A. Establishment of the First MB Church, 1888, at Burwalde

Gerhard Wiebe and the small group of Mennonite Brethren immigrants from Russia were received with great joy and fervent anticipation by the bap-

tized converts in Manitoba. In 1888, with sixteen members, they organized the first Mennonite Brethren Church in Canada.¹ With enthusiasm they proceeded "to encourage one another and build each other up" (1 Thess. 5:11).

The next year, 1889 they built a small chapel in Burwalde on land donated by Jacob Banman.² A number of non-members assisted willingly and gladly in the construction. Although they now had a resident minister, they insisted that Heinrich Voth continue to visit them, remembering the spirit-stirring blessings God had given them through this brother. Over the next few years H. Voth came occasionally to encourage, counsel, and help them with any special problems.

The early members were active in witnessing to others, and many neighbours were attracted by the happy and joyous life of the new converts. Their love and their cheerful singing induced many to attend their worship services and Bible study sessions. The young church quickly adopted the gospel songs of the American revivals; they also sang in harmony. But the greatest attraction was their joyous assurance of salvation. The Mennonite churches of Manitoba taught the gospel of Christ, but said that the only way to achieve eternal salvation was by joining their church and following its rules. Only when standing before the final judgment seat of God would they know their eternal fate, many thought. This uncertainty caused much fear and pain. The preaching of assurance of salvation by Voth and the Mennonite Brethren motivated many to relinquish their former church allegiance and join the little group at Burwalde. The conditions of acceptance there were repentance of sins, acceptance of Jesus Christ as personal Saviour, and baptism by immersion.

B. Expansion of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Manitoba, 1888-1922

Witnessing and Evangelism

The fledgling Mennonite Brethren church immediately revealed a spirit of evangelism. Individuals in many places were searching for assurance of salvation. A request for help came from the Gretna area.³ Missionary Voth had several opportunities to preach in the new Gretna school, established to train teachers for the Mennonite reserves. A certain I. Peters also arranged meetings in the village of Edenburg, three miles from Gretna.

Johann Warkentin, elected locally to assist in preaching,⁴ was sent out to evangelize. He would visit the people in their homes, speak to them about the love of Jesus, pray with them if permitted, and preach in the evenings wherever he could. Occasionally he and Gerhard Wiebe worked together. They were not always welcome, sometimes even rudely refused, but they continued their witnessing. The needs were great, so the young MB Church asked the U.S. Mennonite Brethren to send them evangelists. During the next few years several evangelists came to Manitoba. Peter H. Wedel, a young, dynamic speaker, who had graduated from the Baptist Theological Seminary

in Rochester, N.Y., and was U.S. conference evangelist (1888-95), visited Manitoba in 1890. J. Warkentin writes: "People came and listened and souls were converted. They were particularly attracted by the young man's eloquence."⁵ Wedel also preached in Gretna and Edenburg.

Henry Enns, a student at the Rochester seminary, spent his summer months in Manitoba as a colporteur, going from village to village selling Christian books and telling people of the possibility of assurance of salvation through



Mr. and Mrs. David Dyck

personal faith in Jesus Christ. This way people who did not attend meetings were reached. God graciously gave a time of revival. Gerhard Wiebe reported in the September, 1894 *Zionsbote* that he had baptized twenty-one people aged thirteen to sixty, and in the same month another thirteen.⁶ The Burwalde church grew rapidly, from sixteen members in 1888 to eighty-four in 1895.

David Dyck

In 1895, David Dyck was finally persuaded to move to Manitoba. The trip from Colorado by covered wagon took two months; he brought with him all his material goods and nine of his fifteen children.⁷

Dyck was born in Chortitza, South Russia on January 25, 1846. He had a limited formal education, but through diligent self-study acquired a wide range of knowledge. In 1867 he married Helena Rempel. The couple was converted in 1873 and soon joined the Mennonite Brethren church. In 1876 they immigrated to Kansas. A year later Dyck was called by the Woodson County, Kansas MB church to be its minister. For a short time he also attended Seminary in Rochester, N.Y. Dyck became a well-recognized minister and an effective evangelist in the United States. In 1890 he was ordained as an elder.⁸

Dyck's move to Burwalde gave the young church great encouragement. His Bible-centered preaching strengthened the faith and resolve of the members to be obedient followers of Christ. He also evangelized in other Mennonite communities in Manitoba.

A few months after his arrival, David Dyck assumed the leadership of the Burwalde church from Gerhard Wiebe, and ministered to the church with great effectiveness for nine years. When he left in 1906 for Borden, Saskatchewan⁹ the membership had grown to 225.

Dyck ministered faithfully in the Saskatchewan churches as well, as an

evangelist and moderator of the Northern District Conference. He travelled extensively, even preaching to the Russian immigrants of northern Saskatchewan. He died in Waldheim, Saskatchewan on January 6, 1933. His ministry, blessed by the Lord, had lasted fifty-three years.

Church Life

In studying this first, young, and struggling church, isolated from the example and encouragement of other Mennonite Brethren churches, one is pleasantly surprised how well it progressed. Most of its members had come out of a church background of strict rules, had made a break with this tradition, yet still lived in close proximity to it.

The young church tried to be kind, patient, and forgiving, yet definite in its moral and ethical standards. Voth had advised the congregation not to set too many rules, but rather to allow the love of God to guide their daily lives. Some limits, though, were established to help the inexperienced converts. Smoking, drinking, rowdy revelry, and dancing were not condoned; unrepentant members were excommunicated. There were cases of moral lapses, and members marrying unconverted partners. Though such members were excommunicated, they were again accepted into fellowship if they returned repentantly. Sometimes the church had to exercise much patience. One person was forgiven and taken back into fellowship six times.

Secret love affairs were not tolerated; engaged couples should announce publicly their intention of marriage. Voth was asked about trimming beards. Wisely he counselled that love for the church should make men avoid causing offense. Hunting was frowned upon. The most difficult problem to resolve amicably was a possible quarrel between brethren. Only one such case is mentioned in the Burwalde minutes. A quarrel that is openly discussed in church meetings may become more complicated and entangled. Such was apparently the case in one 1899 church meeting in which the secretary, perhaps not knowing what to write after a long and intractable discussion, burst out on paper, "More light, more light!" and graciously the Lord complied.¹⁰

For the most part, these people lived simple lives of sincere Christian discipleship, earnestly seeking to witness by their conduct. They studied the Bible eagerly, searching conscientiously for answers to their problems. They reached out enthusiastically to their relatives, friends, and neighbours. "They were unfamiliar with theological terminology or definitions, but were extremely knowledgeable with practical applications of Scripture as they applied to every situation in life."¹¹

The Church Matures

David Dyck encouraged the Manitoba church to send delegates to the MB conferences, and when one met in Minnesota in 1897, six brethren attended the convention: David Dyck, Gerhard Wiebe, Johann Warkentin, Abram Hiebert, P.A. Penner, and Isaac Dyck. They invited the next convention to Manitoba.

The 1898 Mennonite Brethren Conference was a great event for the

church; it was the first one held in Canada. To hold the convention in Manitoba meant planning for a bigger church building; the Burwalde chapel was by now much too crowded. Already in 1894 the church, in spite of much opposition from a few, bought a lot in the town of Winkler. The opponents of this desired to remain a country church, fearing becoming worldly in a town. In the spring of 1898 the chapel building was moved to within a mile of Winkler. It remained there for a few days until the opposing members were persuaded to comply,¹² and was then moved to the edge of the town. Immediately construction on the new, bigger church (32 x 56 feet) was begun, with the Burwalde chapel to be used as a kitchen and dining room.

The careful preparations for the convention involved nearly every one in the church. It inspired the congregation and resulted in their feeling part of the larger MB brotherhood. The fact that the U.S. delegates came to Winkler for a convention also gave the church a "grown-up" status in the eyes of the other Manitoba Mennonites.



Johann Warkentin

In 1903 the Mennonite Brethren Church of Winkler was officially incorporated with the Government of Manitoba,¹³ it included all MB members in Manitoba, wherever they lived.

Johann Warkentin

In 1906 Johann Warkentin was asked to lead the Winkler church, which he faithfully did until 1931. Warkentin was born in Nieder Chortitza, South Russia on September 29, 1859 and immigrated to Manitoba in 1879. He married Sarah Loewen in 1889.¹⁴ He taught school in the village of Hofnungsfeld for eight years, then became a farmer. Since ministers were not remunerated at that time, farming remained his livelihood (he had a family of ten children), even though elected pastor of the church. When it was his

turn to minister in Kronsart, approximately twelve miles northeast of Winkler, he travelled by bicycle, in order to save his horses for Monday's farm work.¹⁵

Warkentin was progressive in his thinking, allowing his children to study, and going himself to Bingham, Minnesota for a theological course. He even attempted to study Hebrew with Jewish merchants in Winkler.¹⁶ He supported the teacher training school in Gretna and was a good friend of Principal H.H. Ewert. Although busy with his farm and the preparation of sermons, he always had time to counsel and comfort people in need. He was mild, not critical, and full of understanding for people with spiritual

problems. He loved the Lord above all else and was concerned that his family and the church would walk in Christ's way. His quiet, sincere manner calmed many an upset mind, and diffused tense situations, particularly between the *Russlaender* and *Kanadier Mennonites*.

Sunday School

A Sunday school was begun as soon as believers met for worship services in their homes. Johann Warkentin was the first teacher. He resigned after a few years and Sunday school lagged for a while. In 1890 three classes were organized, with Gerhard Wiebe and two other men as teachers. Because of the inexperience of two of them, it was difficult to continue; Sunday school was held sporadically the next few years. Then in 1896, another effort was begun to hold it every Sunday. Although the teachers were encouraged, the work progressed slowly. The first *Kinderfest* was held in 1899. From 1913, the *Kinderfests* were held regularly and the Sunday school grew. In 1908 the teachers organized a Sunday school convention. By 1919 Sunday school had become one of the most active programs of the church.¹⁷

Choirs

The first choir was organized in 1904. There was no leader; those who enjoyed singing simply came together for the joy of it. A year later Peter P. Dyck became the first choir director. This choir sang only on special occasions, and it was not until 1912 that the church asked the group to sing every Sunday. In 1906 Jacob A. Kroeker became the choir leader and continued in that service for thirty-five years.¹⁸

Mission Efforts

A missionary sewing association (*Naehverein*) was organized in 1907 and remained active for many years. The finished "products" of the association were auctioned and the money distributed for missionary work in the Cameroons, China, Armenia, India, and the Indian mission in the United States.¹⁹

The missionary efforts of the American churches were supported from the very beginning of the Burwalde church, initially, of course, with small amounts of money, but gradually with increased contributions. Interest in missions was particularly stirred during the first conference held in Winkler (1898), and continued on a high level later. At that conference the brethren made the historic decision to send N.N. Hiebert, Peter Rempel, and two sisters to India.²⁰

The first missionary from Canada was Helen Warkentin, a daughter of Johann Warkentin. She was ordained in 1919 and sent to India. Helen concluded her missionary teaching in Deverakonda in 1957, having been on furlough only twice. She died in 1975 in the Winkler Personal Care Home.²¹

Youth Work (Jugendverein)

Already in 1894 young men came together for singing and Bible study. By 1901 these endeavors had become a *Jugendverein*, with meetings held every second Sunday in the MB church. Peter P. Dyck was the first president. The object of the organization was "to offer young people an opportunity to witness through recitation, song and speech."²² Meetings were in the German language. The *Jugendverein* became a much loved church service in Winkler. J.M. Elias, active in this work for many years, compiled a book of religious poems and skits suitable for the programs.

Grossweide

The area generally designated by the MB members as the "East" was the area northeast of Plum Coulee. A mixture of Old Colony and Sommerfelder Mennonites lived here, of whom quite a number had been converted and joined the Church at Burwalde. Because of the difficulty of transportation, especially in winter, these converts gathered in homes in their area. Abram Siemens' home was always open for such services. Their first leader was Jacob Heide.

In 1896 these MBs began to talk about building a church of their own. All of the members, both those of Burwalde and those of the "East," discussed it together, and suggested that since the Burwalde building was becoming too small for the growing membership, the chapel be moved to the "East." This move proved to be unfeasible, however, and it was decided to build a new church, with the expenses to be borne by all. This church became known as Grossweide.²³

Now worship services were held every Sunday except when the Lord's Supper service was held in Burwalde. On the fifth Sunday of a month communion was conducted at Grossweide and the Burwalde members would attend there.

In 1898, after the Burwalde chapel was moved to Winkler, the two churches started quarterly worship services (*Vierteljahresfest*) together; they met on the first Sunday of every quarter of the year, alternating between the churches. These services became highlights of fellowship, spiritual encouragement, and missionary promotion. Business meetings were also held together. Actually the Burwalde and Grossweide congregations were one church in two buildings. It was not until 1925 that Grossweide became an independent church.²⁴

Kronsgart

In the years 1897-98 a number of the Mennonite Brethren bought land about eight to twelve miles northeast of Winkler.²⁵ These members tried to be present at the Winkler services as often as possible. In winter, of course, attendance declined sharply. They began to have services on their own in the Rosewell School. The Winkler Church supplied someone to minister there at

first once and later twice a month.

More people moved into the area, and other residents were converted and baptized. By 1910 services were held every Sunday. The little group of believers appointed Jacob B. Penner as minister-elect. He was ordained in 1917 and served the church devotedly until his retirement in 1943. He was also the secretary of the Manitoba Mennonite Brethren Conference for many years. He died in 1944.

Since the Rosewell School was available only two Sundays of the month, the congregation used the Bloomfield School for the other Sundays. This constant change-over became very bothersome, and frequently they deliberated the necessity of building their own chapel. In 1915 Peter Labun offered land for the church. For a few years, however, there was irresolution as to where the church should be built. Eventually, in 1919, a chapel, 26 x 50 feet, was erected.

A Sunday school was organized when services had started in the Kronsart area, and a *Jugendverein* offered monthly programs. A choir would sing if enough singers and a conductor were available, but was not always possible in a small membership. In 1924 there were 45 members. The Kronsart church became independent of Winkler in 1925.²⁶

Winnipeg ²⁷

In the early decades of the twentieth century Winnipeg was known as "the gateway to the West." For thousands of European immigrants the city was the first stopping point in Canada, in order to investigate the possibility of settlement on prairie land. Many stayed in Winnipeg when work opportunities were offered them.

Among the latter were a fair number of German-speaking immigrants from the Volga area (Saratov) in Russia. Some of them worshipped with Lutherans, others with Baptists. A small group of them had come under pietistic influence in Russia, and desired now special prayer meetings and Bible study. Because their pastor refused to permit such meetings, they began, in 1907, to gather in homes under the leadership of a lay brother, Adam Pauls.

Two, perhaps even more, Mennonite Brethren families had already moved to Winnipeg from the Winkler area. Among them were the David Loewen (later a member of the mission board) and Bernard Reimer families. These joined the small Bible study group of Swabians and Franconians and made them aware of the Winkler MB Church. They asked the Winkler Church to come and help them. The minutes of a January 9, 1908 Winkler church meeting proposed someone "visit the brethren and sisters once a month." This was done alternately by Johann Warkentin and Peter H. Neufeld, a teacher and ordained minister. A later entry in the minutes, May 28, 1908, tells of the request from the Winnipeg group to become members of the Winkler Church, and the decision to go to Winnipeg on June 14, 1908 "to accept those who are believers." On May 29, 1909, the group organized itself into a Mennonite Brethren Church in the home of Brother Trottno. Peter H. Neufeld was present.

At the second business meeting December 21, 1909, the group considered buying a lot for a church building. They also requested Winkler to continue to serve them, since they had no ordained minister. They hoped that someone



Mr. and Mrs. William Bestvater

would come at least four times a year to preach and administer communion.

Through J. Warkentin's efforts a corner lot at Burrows Avenue and Andrew Street was purchased. In 1911 a small chapel was bought and moved from St. Vital onto this lot. People were converted, baptized, and accepted as members of the Winnipeg Mennonite Brethren Church.

Johann Warkentin's brotherly love and concern created a warm and intimate relationship between the Winkler and Winnipeg churches. Regularly, his first question upon meeting them would be, "*Brüder und Schwestern, noch immer auf der Himmelsreise?*" (Brethren and sisters, are you still on the way to heaven?)²⁸ Warkentin was convinced, however, that a permanent ministering couple would have to take over the Winnipeg work in order to make it prosper. Already in 1911 the little group had sent a delegate to the *Bundeskonzferenz* (the General Conference of the U.S. and Canada), meeting in Winkler, to ask for a missionary to serve them. The convention could not see its way through at that time to establishing a mission in Winnipeg. With great urgency, Warkentin brought the matter before the Northern District Conference in 1913. This convention accepted the challenge as its first mission field and asked William J. Bestvater to come to Winnipeg "to serve the small MB congregation and open a city mission work in the city."²⁹ From that time until 1939 the Northern District conference (later known as the Canadian Conference) administered the work in Winnipeg. Church and city mission functions were successfully combined.

Notes Chapter 5

1. Minutes describing the actual organizational meeting of the first M.B. Church of Manitoba are nowhere to be found.

Consult: Brown, Frank. *Mennonite Brethren Church, Winkler, Man. 1888-1963, 75th Anniversary Issue*; Unruh, A.H. *Die Geschichte der Mennonites Bruedergemeinde*, p. 491; Lorenz, John H. *The Mennonite Brethren Church*, p. 79; Toews, John A. *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, p. 153ff; *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. III, p. 599; Neufeld, Arnie. *The Origin and Early Growth of the M.B. Church in Southern Manitoba*. Master's Thesis, M.B. Biblical Seminary, Fresno, CA, 1977.

2. *M.B. Church in Southern Manitoba*.

3. *Winkler M.B. Minutes*. Sept. 29, 1889.

4. *Winkler M.B. Minutes*. Dec. 10, 1892.

5. Warkentin, Johann. *Die Entstehung der Bruedergemeinde in Manitoba: Aufzeichnungen*.

6. Wiebe, Gerhard. *Report in Zionsbote*. Sept., 1894.

7. *Die Geschichte*. p. 492.

8. *The M.B. Church*. p. 294.

9. *History*. p. 158.

10. *Winkler M.B. Minutes*. July 15, 1899.

11. *M.B. Church in Southern Manitoba*.

12. *Winkler 75th Anniversary*.

13. *Winkler M.B. Minutes*. March 15, 1903.

14. *The M.B. Church*. p. 328.

15. Gerbrandt, H.J. *Adventure in Faith*. (Altona, MB: D.W. Friesen & Sons, 1970), p. 168.

16. *M.B. Church in Southern Manitoba*.

17. *Winkler M.B. Minutes*. Dec. 27, 1919.

18. *Winkler 75th Anniversary*.

19. *M.B. Church in Southern Manitoba*.

20. *Winkler M.B. Minutes*. March 28, 1899.

21. Giesbrecht, Sharon. *The Life History of Miss Helen Warkentin*. Student Assignment in Mennonite History Course, Winkler Bible Institute, Arnie Neufeld, Instructor, 1975.

22. *Winkler 75th Anniversary*. p. 26.

23. *Winkler M.B. Minutes*. Nov. 1, 1896.

24. *Die Geschichte*. p. 499.

25. *Die Geschichte*. p. 493.

26. *Die Geschichte*. p. 493.

27. *Winnipeg M.B. Minutes*. These minutes, from 1909 onwards, are now part of the Elmwood M.B. Church repository.

28. Thiessen, Anna. *Die Stadtmission in Winnipeg*. (Winnipeg, MB: Regehr Printing, 1955).

29. *Minutes of the Northern District M.B. Conference*. 1913.

Chapter 6

GROWTH BY IMMIGRATION

A. Immigration in the 1920s

The Revolution of 1917 and the three year civil war that followed totally destroyed the economy of Russia. For years anarchy reigned, giving rise to lawlessness and roving robber bands, of which the notorious Makhno band was the most diabolical. These bandits pillaged, burnt, raped, and murdered with impunity. In the wake of this terrible situation came famine and typhus epidemics. Thousands fell victim to starvation and disease. Life in the formerly prosperous and peaceful Mennonite villages seemed to stand still; it was a time of bitter suffering and despair in the colonies. Many felt life in Russia would never return to normal again and that emigration was the only solution.¹

A delegation of four men was sent to America by the Mennonites to find a way for mass emigration. These men described to the American Mennonite churches the frightful circumstances of their people in Russia and pled for aid. The response was heartwarming. The American and Canadian Mennonites created a committee to organize help and to send goods and personnel to Russia. How timely these efforts were! Food, clothing, grain, and tractors were shipped to the needy. The people in Russia were grateful; it did not diminish their hopes to emigrate, however,² but sharpened the desire to reach the land of plenty.

Meanwhile the four delegates in America negotiated with governments and Mennonites for settling the Russian Mennonites somewhere in the Americas. Through the efforts of Bishop David Toews and several like-minded men permission was received from the Canadian government for the entry of these Russian immigrants.³

During the twenties (1923-1929) 20,201 Mennonite immigrants entered Canada. Most of them settled in the prairie provinces. Manitoba received 2,081 households (approximately 6,800 people).⁴

The immigrants who passed through Winnipeg, often to unknown destinations, usually received a warm welcome from Cornelius N. Hiebert, then mis-

sionary at the Winnipeg City Mission. (See chapter nine) He went regularly to the immigration hall of the CPR station to help the immigrants with kindly



Mr. and Mrs. C.N.Hiebert

advice, distribute clothes, hand out tracts, and preach to them as they sat on their boxes or trunks. He would sing "*Meine Heimat ist dort in der Hoeh*" ("O think of the home over there"). They would listen gratefully and many a tear rolled down from troubled eyes. A great number of them stayed in Winnipeg until they could find a farm or a permanent home, thankful that God had prepared for them a mission and dedicated workers who spoke German to assist them over the initial difficulties in the new country.⁵

The Hieberts had a clothes depot in their basement. In his travels in the United States Hiebert had told people of the plight of many immigrants. Clothes and blankets were sent in for distribu-



Anna Thiessen and her girls.

tion. The immigrants came to ask for necessary clothes. Since they were also too poor to eat in a restaurant, the Hieberts would feed them and keep them for the night. Unfortunately, difficult situations occasionally arose, with some accusing the Hieberts of being unfair in the distribution of clothes. Most of them, though, thanked the missionaries with tears in their eyes; they would have preferred to give rather than to take. Hiebert never neglected to point all comers to Christ, the Helper in time of need, and to pray with them.⁶

In one of his reports to the Manitoba Conference, Hiebert told of an immigrant family to whom twins were born. One of the babies died soon after birth. The family could not pay for a casket, the city would not, so Hiebert did. The other twin was also sick. Knowing the abject condition of the family, Hiebert expected it to die soon. In order to save money, a commodity never plentiful in Hiebert's home, he asked the undertaker not to bury the dead baby until the other would die. The undertaker kindly complied and kept the body for twenty-one days. Then both children were buried in a little casket.⁷

Hiebert often travelled to Moosehorn where he ministered to a few Winnipeg Mennonite Brethren members. Here he bought frozen fish for half a cent a pound and gave them to the needy.

Help for the immigrants also came through Anna Thiessen, another missionary with the City Mission. The new arrivals looked for any opportunity to earn money. If the immigrant family had grown daughters, these could usually find work immediately in the wealthy homes of Winnipeg. Because of their economic need many parents reluctantly allowed their daughter to work in Winnipeg. Miss Thiessen visited the girls, told them of the North End Chapel, inviting them to attend.

A new area of mission work began with these lonely girls. More and more of them arrived from the farms to find work to assist in paying the family *Reiseschuld* (travel debt). They had heard of Sister Anna, as she was affectionately called, and asked for help to find work. In the beginning Sister Anna did not even have a telephone to seek work. She had to go to the neighbours and ask permission to phone. Eventually a telephone was installed to facilitate this employment mediation.⁸

In 1933, a house at 437 Mountain Avenue was purchased to accommodate the girls until employment was secured. This house became known as the Mary-Martha Home. Hundreds of Mennonite women scattered over Canada today gratefully remember the "Home" where they found love, understanding, and kindly advice during the years of their "working out"⁹ in a strange and often harsh world.¹⁰

After their horrendous experiences of the revolution, famine and epidemic in Russia, the immigrants were overwhelmed by the peace in the new country Canada and the love offered them by the Hieberts and Sister Anna. Most of them responded to Hiebert's appeal to order their lives with the Lord, if they had not done so previously. During Hiebert's ministry in Winnipeg, he conducted an altar call every Sunday evening. Often people answered the call to repentance, and once, this happened on seven successive Sunday evening ser-

vices. Many conversions were followed by baptism. Hiebert's records show that he baptized 253 people in Winnipeg alone.¹¹

Settlements

The new immigrants, quite naturally, desired to settle in compact communities. Living as a community would make it possible for them to meet more easily for worship, be with people of similar culture, aspirations and ideals, bring their children up in their accustomed way with little interference from outside, and enjoy the interdependence of people with the same background and difficulties. This ideal could not be realized in Canada, however, except in a small way, because there were few areas available for large settlements. Only in the far North would this be possible, and few dared to go there.

Wherever possible, the immigrants were sent first to established Mennonite communities where they were cared for until they could find their own farms. A CPR agency, the Canada Colonization Association (CCA), together with its affiliate, the Mennonite Land Settlement Board (MLSB), assisted the newcomers to settle. (There were private real estate agents who also tried to get a share of this lucrative market.)

The early immigrants —those who arrived in 1923 or soon thereafter — had the opportunity to settle in the Mennonite East and West reserves of Manitoba. Many of the Manitoba Mennonites left Canada for new settlements in Mexico and Paraguay during 1923-26, because of government pressure to send their children to public schools. They wished to retain their traditional way of life and protect themselves from the infiltration of the "world" through the Canadian school curriculum. Some 291 immigrant families settled on the vacated farms in the villages of the East and West reserves.¹²

Several groups of immigrants were able to settle in fairly large, compact communities on areas owned by American businessmen: around Arnaud (eighty families), Dominion City (twenty-six families), LaSalle (twenty-eight), Osborne, New Siding, Whitewater, Niverville, Elm Creek, Culross, Crystal City, Springstein.¹³ The remaining immigrants bought land from individual farmers all over Manitoba. Some were fortunate to live within driving distance of each other (driving was done by horse and wagon or sleigh). Others again bought farms far from other Mennonites.

Since the new settlers were for the most part completely impoverished, they usually had to buy the land without down payment, and paid for it on an annual share-crop basis.

One immigrant, formerly a teacher in Russia, negotiated the purchase of a farm from an Englishman in the Killarney area, without knowing English or the other knowing German. He was able to buy the fully-stocked farm on a share-crop arrangement after his wife had demonstrated her ability to milk cows. The English farmer later remarked to his friends in town that he was doubtful about the capabilities of the buyer, but his wife surely was a jewel. The farmer never had to regret the sale of his farm without down payment to

a "green" immigrant.¹⁴

Table 1¹⁵ *Where Mennonite Brethren settled in the 1920s*

The immigrants of the early 1920s were able to settle in Mennonite villages of the East and the West reserves, on farms vacated by Mennonites who emigrated to Mexico and to Paraguay.

East Reserve: Barkfield, Bergthal, Burwalde, Grunthal, Halbstadt, Rosengard, Steinbach. West Reserve: Gnadenenthal, Hochfeld, Osterwick, Winkler, Rosenort, Plum Coulee, Neuenburg, Schoenwiese, Altona, Gretna.

Later immigrants acquired farms all over Manitoba from individuals or large companies. Most of the immigrants were settled by the end of 1927.

The following names are post office addresses of Mennonite Brethren. The names with an asterisk * are presently churches or have been at one time.

B. Churches Begun by Immigrants

Worship and Church Activities

*Alexander	Kemnay	*Smith Hill	Mountain Side
*Arnaud	Kenton	*Springstein	Myrtle
Barnsley	*Killarney	Ste. Elizabeth	*Newton
Beresford	La Riviere	*Ste. Rose du	Siding
*Boissevain	*La Salle	Lac	*Niverville
Brockfield	*Lena	Swan River	*North Kil-
*Brookdale	*Manitou	Dunrea	donan
Crystal City	*Margaret	*Elm Creek	Terrence
Croll	*Marquette	Elie	Waskada
Culross	McAuley	Elva	*Whitewater
Deloraine	Oak Bluff	Fannystelle	Wilmouth
Desford	Oak Lake	*Fork River	*Winnipeg
*Domain	Oakville	Forrest	
Dominion City	*Osborne	Fortier	
Douglas	Petersfield	Foxwarren	
Glenlea	Pigeon Lake	McCreary	
Graysville	Poplar Point	*Melita	
*Griswold	Rosser	*Moore Park	
*Holmfield	Sanford	*Morden	
*Justice	*Sperling	Morris	

As soon as the immigrants were settled, they would find others who wanted to worship God on Sundays, and thank Him for the new opportunities. They gathered in homes; their praise of God was heartfelt. If the group was fortunate to include a minister or a former teacher, he would lead the service, otherwise they elected someone to do it. Where there was no minister, sermons were read from a book of sermons, or the group simply had a Bible study and prayer. Invariably there would be much singing from the *Dreiband* (*Glaubensstimme*, *Heimatlänge*, *Frohe Botschaft*), a hymnal without notes, which a few of them had brought along from Russia. Since not nearly all participants in the congregation had these hymnals, the minister, or whoever was leading the singing, would read a line aloud, and the congregation would sing it; he then would read the next line and the congregation continued to sing that. This was repeated until the end of the hymn. Anyone

could suggest another song. Because of this method, many, especially the women, came to know these hymns by heart. Many of the hymns revealed their faith and inner struggles through the early years of adjustment to a new country and way of life.

The singing would be followed by a prayer session, led, in turn, by all male members. Many feared this obligation, but few dared to refuse their turn, because the genuineness of their spiritual life might be questioned. The leader of the prayer session read a passage from the Bible, often a psalm, that had been particularly helpful in his spiritual life, added a few explanatory words, and then urged the congregation to pray. Men and women participated; hearing them pray one could sense the struggles they had experienced through the week.

If the members had to drive many miles to reach the home of worship, they brought food and would stay together for lunch. In the afternoon there would be Sunday school for the children and Bible study for the adults. In the summer they travelled on grain wagons, not the most comfortable ride, but one that got them to their destination, though hot and wind-swept. In the winter, it was quite a different story. The ride in open sleighs was bitterly cold, though some sleighs had a covering to protect the travelers from the biting wind. Inside blankets were further protection and hot bricks warmed the feet. A few enterprising men put small oil stoves into the covered sleighs. The people adjusted remarkably well to all new circumstances; they surmounted obstacles with inimitable courage and humour.

In the beginning of the new Mennonite settlements, the Mennonite Brethren and the General Conference Mennonites worshipped amicably together, often renting a school for their Sunday services. It was only when the question of church organization arose that they separated. If membership of one or the other denomination was too small for organization, the small group continued to worship with the organized church, participating in all activities and also in communion after a public testimony of their faith in Jesus Christ.

Even when the organized group contemplated building a church, the smaller group often willingly helped. The building project, however, usually caused each denomination to go its own way. In most cases the separation occurred in peace and mutual friendship.

Usually the ministers were former teachers, completely self-taught in the matter of theology, without training in hermeneutics or any instruction in homiletics. But they had experienced the new birth in Jesus Christ, had gone through trying circumstances, and had learned to trust the Lord; they had become spiritually strong and were able, in a simple way, to transmit to others what the Lord had given them. They had little time for sermon preparation, study, or meditation, because they worked hard to earn a living for their families. They might think through their next sermon while plowing the fields, travelling slowly to town on horse-drawn wagons, or waiting their turn to unload the sheaves at the threshing machine. Through their words, people were encouraged, uplifted and strengthened to continue the struggle. In spite

of being busy, as any other farmer, the minister took time to visit people in need, to comfort, to counsel. Many of the ministers were towers of spiritual strength. To some God gave the gift of evangelism, to others the gift of counselling and encouragement, and a few had the gift of exposition of Scriptures.

Wherever possible, the immigrant congregations held mid-week Bible studies, conducted in small groups of people who lived not too far apart. Families who lived far away seldom attended, but they tried hard to participate in Sunday services. In some places, where people lived close enough, they met for a Saturday evening prayer meeting, as they had been accustomed to doing in Russia.

Special days were opportunities to fellowship and worship God: the harvest Thanksgiving, Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension Day, and Pentecost. At such times everybody attended the services. In the beginning of their stay in Canada the immigrants celebrated most of these festivals for three days of worship services and visiting with friends. Only with the awareness that this was not done in Canada, and that people working out had to be at their jobs, the celebrations were decreased first to two days and then to one.

Having lived in farming villages in Russia the newcomers found it strange and lonely to live on a farm a mile or two away from the next neighbour. Many of them repeatedly expressed their conviction that it was the Christian fellowship on Sundays that sustained them through the time of adjustment in those bleak, early years. They overcame great obstacles just to be together. Their recurring appeal to the larger churches was not to forget the isolated and spiritually hungry believers.

Important community news such as special meetings called on the spur of the moment or funeral services during the week, were "relayed" from farm to farm. There were no telephones or radios. One farm family would carry the news to the next, and that one was responsible to take the announcement to the next neighbour. It was similar to their custom of carrying notices from household to household with the injunction "*En wieder aunsaji*" (and pass on the information) in their Russian villages.

In keeping with the Mennonite Brethren tradition a visitation program was begun in every church. These visits (*Hausbesuche*) were usually made during the winter. Often a deacon or a minister from a neighbouring church was invited to help the deacon or minister in the home church. The aim of such visits was to encourage members in their spiritual life, and sometimes to counsel or admonish. The visitors would be very frank and to the point, and did not gloss over things. Every person in the family would be gently asked about his relationship to Christ. It often happened that members of the family who had not as yet made a commitment to Christ, would do so during the visit. Most of the time such visits were welcomed and considered essential. There were also those who resented questions about their spiritual life. The general attitude of the church toward such objectors was suspicion that something was not right in their relationship to God.

Most Mennonite Brethren churches affiliated with the well-established Winkler Church, the largest in Manitoba at that time, because there was no

provincial conference of churches until 1929. These fellowships looked to Winkler for spiritual advice. Winkler's leader, Johann Warkentin, was often called to help, sometimes to help a group organize into an affiliated church, sometimes to preach and to baptize, sometimes to conduct the Lord's supper, sometimes to advise on church polity.

Following the Winkler tradition of meeting together four times a year, many Mennonite Brethren within driving distance attended the *Vierteljahresfest*. It became evident that some of the small "stations," as they were called, which could not attend these quarterly meetings, needed spiritual encouragement. In 1925 a plan was devised to assign to each minister a "field" or work; that is, he would be given several places to visit.

The first list of such ministers included: Johann Warkentin, David J. Dick, Henry S. Rempel, Isaak I. Dyck, Henry S. Voth, Jacob B. Penner, Jacob Heide, Johann Retzlaff, Gerhard Klassen, Peter H. Neufeld, Wilhelm Dyck, Herman A. Neufeld, Jacob Buller, Abram Unruh.¹⁶

Later that same year, 1925, J. Warkentin and Wilhelm Dyck (Gnadenthal) were to visit the stations and advise them concerning church organization. The leaders of every station were also advised to list any scattered groups or individual families within twenty miles of their church who seldom or never received a visit from a minister.



Mr. and Mrs. H.S. Rempel

The visit of a minister to a community was always a highlight in the lonely and arduous life of the newcomers, and all efforts were made to attend every service for the few days or the week of the visit. The minister was offered the best house and the best room in that house. Still, accommodation was, although gladly given, quite primitive. The farm houses at that time were cheaply built and not insulated, often heated only by a wood kitchen stove and perhaps an extra wood burning heater, which sometimes was simply a discarded gasoline drum. H.S. Rempel recounted facetiously that he would often have to cover himself for the night with his winter coat, and that his dentures in a cup of water would

have to be thawed out in the morning.

The bigger centers frequently arranged for *Bibelbesprechungen* (Bible exposition and discussion). Usually two invited ministers discussed and interpreted the same Bible passage and the audience asked questions or made comments relative to the topic. Men like Abram H. Unruh, Johann G. Wiens of the Winkler Bible School, David D. Derksen (Whitewater), Jacob W.

Reimer (Steinbach), Henry P. Toews and Abram Nachtigal (both of Arnaud), Johann P. Braun (Morden), and Henry S. Voth (Winkler) were popular speakers. H.S. Voth was also often called upon for evangelistic meetings and J.W. Reimer for the exposition of the Book of Revelation. The "end times"



H.S. Voth



Wilhelm Dyck



Heinrich Toews

topics were always very much in demand. Perhaps because of Reimer, who espoused the premillennial position and the establishment of a Jewish state according to prophecy, this particular view of the end times became firmly accepted in the Mennonite Brethren brotherhood. It is not until recent times that this position has been sharply questioned.

Most groups and organized churches, no matter how small, began immediately with Sunday school. Usually, a young woman, or several, would gather the children in a separate room, often the bedroom, and teach the *Biblische Geschichten* (Bible stories), memorize appropriate verses, and sing songs they had learned in Russia. Often children of all ages were in one class; only where there were enough children and willing teachers, were several classes organized.

When young people began to attend the Winkler Bible School, where they were required to take Christian Education courses, Sunday School lessons became more systematized. With the introduction of Scripture Press materials the immigrant churches, for the first time, came in contact with American influences. The gospel song book, *Evangeliumslieder*, which was used in the Winkler Mennonite Brethren Church and the Winnipeg City mission, was also introduced about that time.

Soon after their organization churches also started a *Jugendverein* (Youth Endeavour) like the one carried on in Winkler. In some churches the *Jugendverein* was loosely structured, others again created a "society" by registering the young people as members, who were then asked in turn to participate in the program. The *Jugendverein* had the purpose of involving young people in church-related activity, making them feel that they were a very necessary part of the church. A youth leader and a youth committee were elected by the church. The committee's work was to plan the monthly program and make the assignments to young people. At the end of each program the next month's program with the names of all participants was

read publicly. The program invariably consisted of singing (solos, duets, quartets, or a youth choir), recitation of poems, devotional readings, a story for the children, and a short devotional by a minister or a young man. Such an opportunity often motivated a young person to attend Bible School, and in some cases resulted in the choice of the ministry as his life's work. The programs also helped young people gain confidence and self-reliance in performing before an audience.

These monthly programs, aside from being devotional, inspirational, and highly beneficial for participants and the public, provided religious entertainment for hardworking people with no other diversion which they as Christians could attend without conscience scruples. For many years every *Jugendverein* was crowded with an expectant audience — parents of every age, young people, and children, were there to listen with pride and perhaps sometimes with a little envy. Friendly and constructive criticism would spur young people on to do their best. Radio, cars, and the growing trend toward better education brought about the demise of a worthy institution.

Common Problems within the Church

The immigrants came from vastly different areas of Russia: Old Colony, Molotschna, Crimea, Kuban, Siberia, Samara, Orenburg, Zagradovka, and so on. All had developed their own ways of church polity and lifestyle. To merge into a homogeneous group on the Manitoba plains was, in the beginning, a difficult task. Tensions often arose over the insistence of some that the same methods they used in the "old country" be used in Canada. A mutual love of God, the need for real fellowship, and the necessity of interdependence eventually molded diverse elements into a congenial group.

The various churches in Manitoba also developed divergent methods of church polity. For example, at its organization Steinbach gave all women the right to vote, whereas others would have only men vote, with women allowed to attend business meetings but not to voice their opinion. Again, some churches did not allow baptized members under fifteen years of age to vote, in other churches franchise was given to members over twenty only, and still others allowed every member to vote.¹⁷

In most churches only members baptized by immersion attended communion services; in others, people baptized by other modes were permitted to participate after a testimony of their conversion. There was a general objection to taking communion with unconverted people. A few churches practiced footwashing.

Membership was given only to those baptized by immersion, though a few churches were not quite so insistent on this. The influence of *Allianz* members was felt in such cases. In Russia, the *Allianz-Gemeinde* accepted all converted people regardless of their mode of baptism. In Canada *Allianz* members were able to create churches and a conference only in Ontario. In Manitoba they were scattered among the churches, and usually joined an MB church. The Arnaud church was an exception. This church began as an *Allianz* church, but soon thereafter decided to join the Canadian Mennonite

Brethren Conference.¹⁸

The matter of leadership also caused tensions and sometimes division in the congregation. Wherever there was a minister who had been in a leadership position in Russia, there was usually little objection to his election as leader. But in the many congregations which had no minister or teacher from Russia, the leadership often became a matter of contestation. Rivalry developed, alleviated only through prayer and compromise, and sometimes by one or more moving away. Such a situation often left a divided membership, and discord took years to mend. Looking back upon the conflicts of former years someone commented apologetically, "Our church canoe was battered and beaten," adding, "but it did not sink."

Another difficulty in some congregations was the matter of an "inner group," a sort of clique, making all the decisions for the membership. Often this group was the council. Almost invariably the council consisted of ministers and deacons only, and since they were all ordained for life, they formed a permanent council. Complaints that members had no part in the decisions about concerns affecting them all, were often heard. The council, they accused, was legislating rather than advising. In most cases the council realized quickly that their assumption of power created dissension, and became more careful what it proposed to the membership and how. Other congregations solved the problem by abrogating the traditional council and electing the members, not necessarily ministers and deacons, although the leader of the church was invariably also the chairman of the council.

The subject of spiritual growth of the individual member was not only the concern of the leadership, but also of the entire congregation. If anyone had been absent three times from communion services, he was to be contacted and asked the reason for his truancy. Disciplinary action in cases of misconduct or sinful behavior was carried out according to Matthew 18. Excommunication of unrepentant members was considered absolutely necessary. Occasionally the church acted too hastily and judgmentally to allow for a repentant return to the fellowship. At times disciplinary action created division when members took sides. To the glory of God it can be reported that wise and conciliatory views generally predominated.

The matter of a regular Sunday collection, by taking a bag or plate from person to person, was new to the immigrant churches. That had never been done in Russia. They had to learn to give for the church, Tabor College, and foreign missions. Many learned giving with difficulty and only after much urging.

Table 2 - Churches Organized by Immigrants¹⁹

1925 - Gnadenthal

This was a village established in 1875. Vacated farms left by Mennonites who moved to Mexico were occupied by immigrants from Russia. The church was affiliated with Winkler.

1925 - Arnaud

The immigrants settled on American Company's land. They organized into

an "Allianz" church, but joined the Canadian MB Conference in 1926.

1926 - Alexander

It first affiliated with Winkler. The group bought a church building in Griswold and changed its name (1929-1954) to Griswold Mennonite Brethren Church. In 1954 it built a new church in Alexander and reverted to its original name.

1926 - La Salle

MB immigrants living in La Salle, Domain, and Osborne were organized into one church with a church building in La Salle. The Osborne group worshipped by itself until 1952. At that time the three groups re-organized into the Domain MB Church with a new building in Domain.

1927 - Steinbach

and area groups: Burwalde (East Reserve), Rosengard, Grunthal, Bergthal, Halbstadt created one church. All worshipped separately, but would get together four times a year (*Vierteljahresfest*). With the advent of cars they began to worship together.

1927 - Manitou

There were three groups who worshipped separately but came together once a month. This changed with the acquisition of cars.

1927 - Altona

1928 - Whitewater

In 1944 a church was built in Boissevain, and the name was changed to Boissevain MB Church.

1928 - Holmfield

A church was formed with people from Holmfield and Lena. They worshipped separately except for one joint meeting a month. In 1938 they became two churches: Holmfield-Smith Hill and Lena. In 1945 the first church closed its doors and the remaining members joined Lena. Lena became Lakeview MB Church of Killarney in 1967.

1928 - Newton Siding

Today it is Newton MB Church.

1929 - Margaret MB Church

1929 - Elm Creek

This church was established with twenty-three members and was affiliated with Winkler until 1931.

1929 - Niverville

Established with eighteen members.

1930 - Brookdale MB Church

In the years 1940-43 the group worshipped in Moore Park. In 1944 they built a chapel near Justice and renamed their church.

1930 - Morden MB Church

1932 - Melita MB Church

A few years later the members joined the Boissevain Church.

1932 - Sperling

In 1967 the members joined Elm Creek, although they continued to worship separately until all had moved to the city.

1933 - *Halbstadt*

This was one of the groups that, with other churches, had organized the Steinbach church. It became independent in 1933. After a few years it again joined Steinbach.

1933 - *Ste. Rose du Lac*

This group was accepted by the Manitoba Conference. No further information is available. No Mennonite Brethren live there today.

1935 - *Fork River*

This group was also accepted by the Manitoba conference. No Mennonite Brethren live there today.

1935 - *Springstein*

This group affiliated with the Winnipeg MB Church. It became independent in 1941.

Two existing churches (Winkler and Winnipeg) benefited from the large influx of immigrants.

Most of the immigrants heard of Winkler already in Russia as being the largest Mennonite Brethren congregation in Manitoba. Many of them specified "Winkler" as their destination in Canada. They received a warm welcome when they arrived. Those were busy times for the leading people of the town. With inimitable patience and goodwill J. Warkentin helped and supported the newcomers. There were often requests for financial assistance. The church helped with clothes, food, shelter, and loans where feasible, but gifts were not to exceed \$25.

Many of the immigrants gradually found their way onto farms or to employment in Winnipeg. Though scattered all over Manitoba, they looked to Winkler for counsel and advice; it was for them the "Jerusalem" for many years to come, and J. Warkentin was kept in grateful memory long after his retirement.

The Canadian MB Conference considered the Winnipeg Chapel to be a city mission. With the wave of immigrants in the 1920s it grew and gradually acquired the characteristics of a church. All functions of a church soon became evident in it: German Sunday school, adult Bible study, choirs, musical groups, *Jugendverein*, young men's organization, women's clubs, girls' and boys' clubs. Many members assisted willingly in the work of the mission. Outstanding among these was Abram B. Peters, who participated faithfully in hospital visitation, preaching, teaching and counselling.

When the chapel became overcrowded a new meeting place was built on College Avenue in 1931. In spite of that, people began to worship in several places. The immigrants were scattered all over the city and beyond. A large group lived south of the CPR tracks and another had settled in the North Kildonan municipality just outside the city limits. In the late 1920s the Winnipeg MB Church actually consisted of five groups that worshipped independently: North End, South End, North Kildonan, Springstein, and Marquette.

C. The 1930 Mennonite Immigration

When the Russian government introduced the collectivization of farms in 1928, it brought with it oppressive measures. Farmers who hesitated to become part of the collectives were branded as "*kulaks*." These lost their voting rights and their property, and were often exiled to the "North." There seemed no hope for the Mennonites to retain the life they had known; complete integration into the communist system seemed inevitable.

The news that a few families had received passports to leave the country spread like wildfire throughout the Mennonite and German-speaking colonies in Russia. Thousands of them hastened to Moscow in 1929 to seek permission to leave the country. The communist government claimed it would let them go if there would be countries to accept them.

Since the first forebodings of the 1930s depression were already felt worldwide, however, governments hesitated to accept refugees who would only add to their unemployment problems. Canada firmly closed its doors to immigrants.

When the Russian government began shipping the unwanted people in Moscow into exile or back home, Germany opened its doors, receiving 5671 refugees, 3885 of them Mennonites. The rest estimated at more than double that number were sent into exile.²⁰

Germany could not accommodate these refugees itself. Eventually 1,500 went to Paraguay, and more than 1,000 to Brazil. Under extreme pressure, Canada permitted 1,344 to enter, these were such who had relatives in Canada who would guarantee their support until they were able to fend for themselves. They arrived at a time of economic depression. Most of them were received by relatives living on farms, but the economic situation was such that they could not acquire land. They simply had to find employment. Those who stayed in Manitoba gradually drifted into Winnipeg. They were eager to join a church, thanking the Lord for their miraculous escape from communist oppression and for the opportunity to make a new start in a free country. None of them became a burden to the state.

D. Immigration after World War II

During the great retreat of the German army from Russia in the World War II thousands of Mennonites fled toward Germany, with the Russian army in close pursuit. Many of them fell victim to the ravages of the terrible war. Several thousand who reached the Allied zones were taken care of by the Mennonite Central Committee and eventually settled in Paraguay, Uruguay, Brazil, and Canada. Canada's rigid immigration laws allowed Canadian citizens to apply for entry of refugee relatives. Industries also were permitted to bring in essential workers. By these means 1,991 Mennonites reached Manitoba.

Table 3 ²¹

Immigration 1947-49

To Manitoba in 1947...	288
in 1948..	1140
in 1949...	<u>563</u>
Total....	1991

Following the immigration to Paraguay and Brazil many of the refugees found their pioneering life there so difficult that they attempted to come to Canada. Again applications were made under the "Close Relatives Act." Many succeeded. They did not come in large groups, but as individual families only. These were to stay on farms for at least a year before they would be allowed to strike out on their own in cities. But many of the relatives who called out their parents, or brothers or sisters, or others, already lived in cities, so that the new immigrants were taken care of there. Since employment opportunities were excellent during the post war years, most of the newcomers stayed in cities and immediately found work.

Table 4 ²²

From South America to Canada 1947-61....	3,405 immigrants
From South America to Manitoba 1947-61....	2,101 immigrants

Late Arrivals Direct from Russia

Under pressure of world opinion to unite broken families separated by World War II Russia permitted such people to leave the country. A number of them reached Canada, a few to Manitoba. These families quickly felt at home in the churches of Winnipeg. The young people, of course, speaking Russian almost exclusively, took a little longer to adjust to Canada than their elders.

Notes Chapter 6

1. Toews, John A. *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*. (Hillsboro, KS: Board of Christian Literature of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1975), Chap. 8.
2. For more detailed information see Part III of Frank Epp's *Mennonite Exodus*; also J.A. Toews' *A History of the M.B. Church*, Chapter 11, p. 161ff.
3. Epp, Frank. *Mennonites in Canada 1920-1940*. (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1982), p. 178.
4. *Mennonites in Canada*. p. 191.
5. Thiessen, Anna. *Die Stadtmission in Winnipeg*. (Winnipeg, MB: Regehr's Printing, 1955) p. 30.
6. *Die Stadtmission*. p. 30.
7. *Die Stadtmission*. p. 30.
8. *Die Stadtmission*. p. 30.
9. The expression "working out" "*ausarbeiten*" was commonly used by the immigrants to denote working away from home. Where it originated is unknown.
10. Horch, Esther. *C.N. Hiebert Was My Father*. (Winnipeg, MB: The Christian Press, 1979), p. 71.
11. *My Father*. p. 73.
12. *Mennonites in Canada*. pp. 199-200.
13. *Mennonites in Canada*. p. 203.
14. Sawatzky, P.F. *Interview in Killarney*. 1980.
15. It is very likely that a few place names, where M.B.s settled, are not mentioned. The reported names have been taken from lists of delegates at Manitoba and Canadian conferences. In all probability people in outlying areas never attended conventions. These are post office names, not churches.
16. *Winkler M.B. Minutes*. April 10, 1925.
17. *Steinbach M.B. Church Organization Minutes*. January 3, 1925.
18. Unruh, A.H. *Die Geschichte der Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde*. (Winnipeg, MB: The Christian Press, 1954), p. 495.
19. Information for the church stories was taken from their respective minutes, from their anniversary accounts, from A.H. Unruh's *Die Geschichte der Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde*, and from personal interviews.
20. *Mennonite Exodus*. p. 236.
21. *Mennonite Exodus*. p. 408.
22. *Mennonite Exodus*. p. 442.

Chapter 7

MEMBERSHIP MIGRATION

A. Depression and Its Influence

A few years after the arrival of the 1920s wave of Mennonite immigrants the stock market crash of 1929 in New York occurred, the effects of which reverberated throughout the world. This event caused economic breakdown everywhere. Business across Canada became sluggish or collapsed completely; unemployment rose to more than twenty percent.¹ Canada at that time had no unemployment insurance or welfare programs.

At the same time, 1929, a drought, considered to be "the most intense and prolonged of the dry cycles in the history of the West,"² began on the prairies. High wind accompanied the drought and the dry topsoil was blown into the air, darkening the sky like thunderclouds. As the wind died down, the soil lay piled in ditches or against fences blocked by Russian thistle. Farm machinery and small granaries were literally buried in the finest soil, and the fields were left bare and unproductive. Some farmers did not seed their land. Wherever it was still possible to seed, grasshoppers by the millions devoured the green crop. Where the ravages of drought and grasshoppers had not destroyed the grain, rust lowered its value. The price of wheat dropped to 34 cents a bushel, then to 29 cents, and in some areas even lower.³ With the drop in grain prices, other farm products declined in value. It was a situation that tested to the utmost the equanimity of even the best of people. "It was a decade that destroyed men's faith in themselves, mocked their talents and skills, blighted their initiative and subverted their dedication to the cultivation of their land."⁴

The immigrants had just begun to breathe a little easier after the first difficult years, when the depression struck. The combination of drought, grasshoppers, and economic depression was grimly dubbed "Dirty Thirties." But the new settlers had the deep religious conviction that God was controlling the universe, that any disaster was known to Him, and that He would not "leave nor forsake them" (Hebrews 13:5). They had experienced even greater distress in Russia during the revolution, famine, and epidemics. Difficulties brought out latent skills and inventiveness to overcome them. All people, whether old timers or new immigrants, were in the same straitened cir-

cumstances, the only difference being that the latter had assumed large farm debts and had not yet been able to liquidate their Reiseschuld (transportation debt to the CPR for bringing them to Canada).

Many held on desperately to their farms by renegotiating the contracts, hoping and praying for better crops. Most of the Red River area farmers managed somehow, but many in the western part of the province were forced to move. "The exodus from the dust bowl was a mere trickle in 1931, but by 1935 the trickle had become a flood."⁵

The movement was to Ontario or to British Columbia. A few tried to find work in the cities. The small settlement at the outskirts of Winnipeg, North Kildonan, had a number of these displaced farmers. Through industry and frugality this settlement grew into a progressive and successful colony.

The exodus away from farms was the reason for many of the little churches closing their doors. In most cases these congregations had not as yet built a church when the depression struck. The few members that remained joined the nearest larger churches. Since the conference did not keep records of membership until the 1940s it is impossible to ascertain how many Mennonite Brethren members left Manitoba.

Table 5

The following churches closed during the depression:

Halbstadt ?(date unknown)	Margaret 1940
Holmfield-Smith Hill 1945	Fork River ?
Melita ?	Ste. Rose du Lac ?

B. Shifting Membership through Urbanization

The first Mennonite Brethren in Manitoba were farmers living in villages or on their own quarter section. In 1882 the railway was built and a small siding established where the town of Winkler stands today. The first to move to the railroad stop were German Lutherans. The land belonged to a Mennonite, Jacob Wiens. Since Mennonites were opposed to towns and town life, Wiens sold his land to a Lutheran by the name of Valentin Winkler, and by 1892 the town of Winkler had become a center of German Lutherans.⁶ Gradually a few Mennonites dared to move in. By 1895 the Bergthaler church was built in town.⁷

In spite of strong opposition the Burwalde Chapel was moved to the edge of the town of Winkler in 1897.⁸ Now more and more Mennonite Brethren settled in Winkler. This was the first step in the urbanization of the Mennonite Brethren.

According to old records two Mennonite Brethren families with traditionally Mennonite names were members of the Winnipeg MB Church when it organized in 1909.⁹ Where they came from cannot be ascertained, but a reasonable supposition would be from the Winkler area. It was not until the immigrants from Russia arrived in the 1920s that a large number of them settled in Winnipeg.

Most of the immigrants intended to make Winnipeg a temporary home until they would find a farm to settle on. In the meantime they had to look for work in the city, and having secured employment, many preferred to stay; others bought farms. Also, a number of immigrants had been city dwellers in Russia and did not relish to begin farming here. There were also many daughters of MB farmers doing housework in the city to help their parents financially. For years to come the Winnipeg MB Church had a fluctuating membership.

In the wake of the depression many farmers abandoned their farms and moved to other provinces, and a few came to the cities. These, in spite of the thousands of unemployed who walked the streets of Winnipeg, still found temporary employment until something more permanent would come up. Winnipeg also lost a large number of Mennonite Brethren through the so-called "B.C. fever."

After World War II, the mechanization of farms advanced rapidly. "The tractor was probably the most powerful urbanizing influence of the 20th century. . . . Other labour-saving machines beside the tractor were developed the self-propelled combine eliminated the traditional harvest crews."¹⁰ Farmers who at one time had employed all their sons at home could now do more work and farm larger acreages with fewer hands. Two results followed. First, many young people, who had their grade VIII standing, continued their studies through high school and beyond, because they were not needed for work on the farms. The educational level of Mennonites rose quickly. Second, young men and women began to seek opportunities in the cities. During the economic boom after World War II profitable employment was plentiful. These Mennonite young people were used to hard work. Honesty, perseverance, and reliability contributed to their rapid advancement. Urbanization tends toward specialization, and Mennonite Brethren made rapid strides into every type of business, vocation, and profession. Even involvement in politics, the legal profession, and government offices, previously frowned upon, became readily acceptable. The conveniences and amenities of city life also contributed to the accelerating trend into the cities.

The Mennonite population of Winnipeg, according to Canadian census records, was 13,595 in 1961, 17,850 in 1971, and 19,110 in 1981.¹¹ Winnipeg had the distinction of having the highest concentration of Mennonites of any city in the world.

*Table 6*¹²

Mennonite Brethren Membership in Manitoba

	Rural	Town (Winkler, Steinbach, Morden)	City (Winnipeg, Brandon)
1914	202		33
1924		326	48
1934	916	582	468
1944	1040	702	569

1954	1307	773	1174
1964	1227	756	2269
1974	1025	813	2848
1984	1229	946	3267

Many of the members of the Winkler church in 1914 and 1924 were still living on farms. Some members of the Winkler, Steinbach, and Morden churches are farmers today. Even Winnipeg and Brandon have a few members who live on farms but regularly attend city worship services.

The movement to the cities naturally affected the churches, both those in the country and those in the cities. The writer of the story of Grossweide graphically described the dilemma of the country communities: "By the early 60s the process of urbanization was being keenly felt in many smaller communities. . . . Smaller family farms were being replaced with larger mechanized operations. The young people, looking for employment and job opportunities, were forced to leave their homes and move to larger centers where positions were readily available. Business establishments in smaller towns and villages, unable to compete with competitors in larger towns, were forced to close or relocate. With improved transportation facilities more and more shoppers travelled through their own home communities on their way to 'better selection and lower prices' in larger trading centers."¹³

Membership in the country churches declined drastically. The old and the young were gone, the old into retirement, and the young into the larger world of opportunity. Those who remained, endeavoured to carry on the usual church activities, often under distressing difficulties. A number of churches eventually had to be closed; others had to be content with curtailed activities. Town and city churches grew in membership and their church activities were well-organized and "stocked" with talent. This created an imbalance of importance between country and city churches.

Another inevitable effect of the dwindling rural membership was the change to English worship services in country churches, whereas a select number of Winnipeg churches, because of their retired members, must still have German activities.

There is generally a good understanding between country and city members. The common concept that urbanization denotes a sophisticated deportment cannot really be said of the city Mennonite Brethren, for by now the country people, through the acquisition of modern conveniences and advancement in education, have also become, to a large extent, "urbanized." There is a constant flow of social, educational, and spiritual interchange between country and city. The MB Conference of Manitoba has become more united than ever before.

Table 7 ¹⁴

Churches that were dissolved

Altona - dissolved in 1951

Alexander - discontinued in 1973. Most members joined the Brandon

Church.

Arnaud - had its last service in 1980 with only six members.

Gnadenthal - was dissolved in 1954.

La Salle and Osborne changed into Domain MB Church. It discontinued in 1981.

Springstein - dissolved in 1961.

Sperling - discontinued in 1967.

Kronsgart - closed its doors in 1973. The minutes of the last meeting stated: "The reason for this decision was not the small membership, which stood at approximately 30, but rather to provide greater opportunity for Christian fellowship and social activity for the children and young people."

Grossweide - discontinued by joining Horndean Mission in 1964.

Horndean - dissolved in 1983.

C. Movement of Members by Division of Churches

The Winnipeg MB Church, called the North End Church, was situated on College Avenue. Members in North Kildonan and the core area, south of the CPR tracks, had to take the streetcars to attend worship services. This became very inconvenient, even a hardship for some families and older people, standing at streetcar stops in all kinds of weather, especially in winter. Also for immigrant families, (struggling to make their payments), the car fares twice a Sunday were too expensive. For these reasons the groups began worship services in their own areas. They officially belonged to the North End Church, but came together only four times a year, for the *Vierteljahresfeste*. Eventually they organized their own churches; South End in 1936 and North Kildonan in 1938.

To accommodate membership increase the North Kildonan church enlarged its facility five times and after that built the present meeting place. The South End group rented and bought several facilities until they acquired the Wesley Church on William Avenue. Eventually churches faced the steady increase of membership with the idea of dividing the church rather than enlarging or buying bigger churches.

Several factors motivated the creation of new churches. Since many older people from the country had moved to the city, the churches were obliged to continue their services in German. On the other hand many younger people and parents whose children could no longer follow a German message, agitated for a change of language. This problem created severe emotional strain. There was also the overcrowding of Sunday school facilities and the sanctuary. A third reason was the laudable desire of many to evangelize the area in which they lived. Usually Sunday schools were begun in rented public schools. Such groups eventually began regular Sunday morning services. Soon new church groups developed, not only with those who had missionary zeal, but also such who simply preferred the English language to the German.

Division was the simplest solution to all these problems. Unfortunately, such breaking away from the mother church sometimes created bad feelings, which only time has mended.

River East MB Church

In the late 1940s interest in outreach into the community inspired a few North Kildonan members to organize a mission Sunday school. In 1960 they rented Princess Margaret School for two dollars a Sunday. Two years later worship services were also begun. On January 6, 1963 approximately sixty members organized themselves into a church with J.H. Quiring as leader. After several name changes the church was called River East MB Church in 1964.

McIvor Avenue MB Church

When, in the 1970s, the North Kildonan Church struggled with the language problem, one solution was to establish a new church. This seemed reasonable to most, because the church was too large with 750 members. It was decided to build another sanctuary involving the total membership. One third of the cost was to be collected before even attempting to build. The rest of the cost was to be divided in the following way: the outgoing congregation would pay sixty percent, and the remaining members forty percent. The new congregation would use only English.

After all this planning, collecting one third of the cost, and waiting until the building was well under way, the members were asked to decide whether they would go or stay. Two hundred forty-eight members voluntarily chose to transfer to the new church. On October 10, 1976 they had their first service. The separation was conducted amicably and there exists today a mutual respect.

Portage Avenue MB Church

The South End Church eventually became so crowded that every available space was used for Sunday school. The majority of members voted to build a large new church with the prospect of having services in English. A small group, fearing the loss of German services as well as objecting to the enormous expense of a new building, decided to stay in the old church and organize a new congregation. On September 19, 1960 the break-away group became the Winnipeg Central MB Church. The majority built a new church, which was dedicated October 10, 1961 and renamed itself Portage Avenue MB Church.

Fort Garry MB Church

The Gospel Light Mission on Logan Avenue became the Gospel Light MB Church in 1956 with 26 members. A building fund was started soon after the organization. Four years later most of the members joined together to buy a church on 760 McMillan, which was named Fort Rouge MB Church. This

was the first Winnipeg church to conduct services entirely in English. It later became the Fort Garry MB Church. The Gospel Light Mission on Logan Avenue continued its missionary effort.

Westwood Community Church

The Portage Avenue Church included a large group of members who resided in the west of Winnipeg. Motivated by the desire to have a church in their area to evangelize the community they organized the Westwood Community Church. The chartering service was held April 15, 1979 with fifty-nine members. Soon after its organization the church formulated the following statement of purposes: "Westwood Community Church exists for the three-fold purpose of worship, edification, and outreach. We will seek to bring acceptable offerings to God and to build up one another with a view to practicing an evangelism that cares for the whole person in our community."

Notes Chapter 7

1. Epp, Frank. *Mennonites in Canada 1920-1940*. (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1982), p. 348.
2. Morton, W.L. *Manitoba: A History*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), p. 421.
3. *Manitoba: A History*.
4. Gray, James H., *The Winter Years*. (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1966), p. 6.
5. *The Winter Years*. p. 161.
6. Brown, Frank. *A History of Winkler*. (Altona, MB: Published by the author. Printed by D.W. Friesen & Sons, 1973), pp. 12-13.
7. Gerbrandt, H.J. *Adventures in Faith*. (Altona, MB: D.W. Friesen & Sons, 1970), p. 126.
8. Brown, Frank. *Mennonite Brethren Church, Winkler, MB, 1888-1963, 75th Anniversary*. (Altona, MB: D.W. Friesen & Sons, 1963), p. 42.
9. *Minutes of the Elmwood M.B. Church*. 1909.
10. Bellan, Ruben C. *The Evolving City*. (Vancouver: The Copp Clark Publishing Co., 1971), p. 101.
11. *Canada Census*. 1961, 1971, 1981.
12. *Winkler M.B. Church Minutes and Manitoba M.B. Conference Yearbooks*.
13. Author Unknown. *A Brief History of the Horndean M.B. Church June 18, 1980*.
14. Information for the church histories was taken from their respective church minutes, from their anniversary accounts, and from personal interviews.

Part III

WE, WHO ARE MANY, FORM
ONE BODY
(1 Cor.10:7)

Chapter 8

UNITING THE SCATTERED CHURCHES

Originally the three churches - Winkler, Grossweide, Kronsart - were actually one church. Worship services, communion, baptism and strictly local matters were carried on by each group independently of the others, but discipline policies, doctrinal questions, building expenses, ordination and other common concerns were decided at their *Vierteljahresfeste* (quarterly festivals). These quarterly meetings were a time of worship, fellowship, discussion of mutual problems, and decisions. This arrangement worked well, and satisfied the needs of the whole brotherhood.

The Manitoba Mennonite Brethren Church, had, since 1889, sent delegates to the U.S. Mennonite Brethren Conference and was, for that reason, closely connected with the brethren south of the border. In doctrine and church-related matters the Manitoba Church took its counsel from the U.S. Church. In 1898 Winkler hosted the *Bundeskonzferenz* (General Conference) for the first time. When in 1909 the General Conference divided into the Southern, Central and Northern Districts, it became a serious question for the Manitoba Church which district to join. It felt greater affinity with the American brethren than with the Northern District, which consisted of Saskatchewan MB Churches. Eventually, in 1913, the Manitoba church, being Canadian, affiliated with the Northern District.¹ At that time the three Manitoba churches were not considered a conference.

It was not until the influx of immigrants in the 1920s that a need arose to expand the three church brotherhood. The first immigrant group to organize as a church and join the Winkler "*Kreis*" (circle) was Gnadenthal, on April 10, 1925. At the same time the brotherhood meeting also decided that Johann Warkentin (Winkler) and Wilhelm Dyck (Gnadenthal) were to visit the small groups of Mennonite Brethren immigrants scattered all over Manitoba, to advise them how to organize into a church and help them elect a leader and deacons.²

On January 6, 1926,³ the first quarterly meeting of the year, the brethren agreed upon a plan for the "*Kreis*" of the MB Church, a sort of simple con-

stitution:⁴

1. The "*Kreis*" (circle) of the MB Church encompasses Winkler, Grossweide, Kronsgart, Gnadenhal.
 2. In matters of worship, communion, footwashing each church is independent, but mutual visits are encouraged.
 3. In all important points the churches will preserve brotherly unanimity.
 4. Election of servants of the church, such as ministers and deacons, is done in the presence of brethren who have been elected by the whole brotherhood.
 5. The leader of the Winkler MB Church will also be elected by the whole brotherhood (if an election is necessary), as well as the member of the trustees and the chief treasurer, when their terms expire.
 6. The Winkler MB Church will call general meetings according to need, but no less than four times a year.
- Note: The general meeting is being decided upon by the Council of the "*Kreis*", which meets monthly.
7. Baptisms are decided upon each church, but it invites the others.
 8. Each church transacts discipline, also excommunication, on its own, but in case of difficulties, in conjunction with the others.
- Note: Every church is to make sure that at least a few brethren follow the invitation to attend the disciplinary meetings.
9. Although each church keeps its own books, they also have joint bookkeeping in Winkler. Quarterly, each church must inform the chief bookkeeping office of any changes that have occurred.
 10. All incomes and expenditures, except those pertaining to home use, are to be reported annually to the chief treasurer.

This statement implies that there was a general council of the "*Kreis*." According to the "Note" in #6 this council decided the general meetings, whereas #6 says the Winkler Church did that. There must have been also a trustee board of four members, one from each district, and all elected at the quarterly meetings. Leaders of the churches were also elected by the whole brotherhood, and, as it seems, for an indefinite period. Whether the leadership was reviewed annually or a confidence vote taken, was not clearly stated in any minutes. The moderator and the chief treasurer were always chosen from the Winkler Church membership.

Winkler became a sort of mother church for Mennonite Brethren of the new immigrants. As quickly as possible they wanted to be members of a Canadian MB church, for this gave them a sense of belonging. Therefore, immigrants as widely dispersed as Steinbach and Alexander affiliated with the Winkler Church.

In 1927 a few of these groups, Alexander, Osborne, and Steinbach, requested to be accepted as "sister churches" of the Winkler "*Kreis*." These groups were sent the constitution of the "*Kreis*" and were received into the circle of churches.⁵

Again in 1928 Winkler felt the need to get in contact with the remaining

pockets of settlers who were too far from any existing churches. A committee was elected at the quarterly festival to visit such people. It consisted of Johann Warkentin, Jacob B. Penner, Johann G. Wiens, Herman A. Neufeld, Gerhard Derksen, Wilhelm Dyck, Henry S. Rempel. An itinerary was worked out for these men to minister to the outlying areas.⁶

According to the Winkler minutes a meeting of all MB groups (also such who were not affiliated with Winkler) was held June 14, 1929. At this meeting it was decided that all churches were independent of each other, yet joined into a union (*Bund*). To facilitate a close relationship of all churches a secretary, a sort of liaison officer for the churches, was elected. Meeting together four times a year, as the smaller circle had done, was impractical now that there were many churches. The decision was made to have only two sessions, one in spring and one in the fall. These sessions were called "*Vertreterversammlungen*," a meeting of representatives. This 1929 meeting was the birth of the Manitoba Brethren Conference. A year later it was decided that the churches could send to the conventions one delegate for every fifteen members or fraction thereof.

Nowhere is it stated how many or which churches joined to constitute a conference.

The transaction of having formed a union seemed indefinite and uncertain even to some delegates. Two churches, LaSalle and Niverville, were not sure that they belonged to the conference. Upon their inquiry they were told, "All churches which attended at the time of the union of churches are part of the Manitoba Conference."⁷ Still, we do not know which churches were present.

The difficulty of ascertaining which churches attended lies in the fact that the convention listed delegates according to their home post office, rather than their churches. Names like Barnsley, Crystal City, Culross, Dunrea, Fannystelle, Foxwarren, Grunthal, Hochfeld, McAuley, McCreary, Moore Park, Moosehorn, Oak Bluff, Osterwick, Pigeon Lake were not organized churches according to all available research material.

A number of these delegates can be traced to nearby churches: Culross, Barnsley to Elm Creek; Crystal City to Manitou; Dunrea to Margaret; Moore Park to Brookdale; Pigeon Lake to Marquette; Oak Bluff, Fannystelle to LaSalle; McCreary to Newton; Foxwarren, McAuley to Griswold; Hochfeld, Osterwick to Winkler. As far as can be determined the following churches belonged to the union of 1929: Elm Creek, Gnadenthal, Griswold, Grossweide, Holmfield, Kronsart, LaSalle, Margaret, Manitou, Newton Siding, Niverville, Steinbach, Whitewater, Winkler, Winnipeg.

According to a note in the *Mennonitische Rundschau* (August, 1930) Manitoba had fourteen churches, forty-four ministers, and 1483 members. The discrepancy with the 1929 information is difficult to explain.

In 1929, Arnaud, an "*Allianz*" church, asked to join the MB Church of Canada. The Bund accepted Arnaud into its union and recommended it for acceptance in the Northern District Conference (later renamed the Canadian MB Conference).

Over the next years a few more churches were organized and accepted by

the Manitoba Conference:

1930 - Brookdale, Morden

1931 - Oxbow (Saskatchewan)⁸

1932 - Sperling, Melita, Altona

1933 - Ste. Rose du Lac, Halbstadt

1935 - Fork River⁹

The first secretary for the new conference was Johann G. Wiens, the Bible School teacher.¹⁰ His main task was to call the ministers of all churches to a meeting to plan the visitation itinerary. Until that time the Winkler church had done this. Every willing minister was given the opportunity to serve outside his home church.

For many years after 1931 Jacob B. Penner, Kronsart, was the secretary. There also existed a *Vorberat* (a council) to discuss beforehand the agenda of the convention, for Penner mentions that such a council met April 25, 1931. How this council was elected and who the members were cannot be ascertained.

Most of the time at the conventions was given to reports of the travelling ministers and comments from the various churches. Again and again the delegates expressed their satisfaction for the ministry received. The ministerial visits were spiritual highlights in the hard and often depressing beginnings of pioneer life.

It took only a few years before the churches began to be a little more demanding as to which minister should come to serve them. It was then stipulated at the conventions that only such ministers to whom "God has given gifts" should be asked to do itinerary work. Gifted evangelists and ministers "capable of giving systematic biblical instruction" were particularly in demand.¹¹ In 1931, eighteen brethren were ministering, nine for four weeks, and nine for two weeks. In 1932, twenty-six brethren were asked to serve, eight for one month, and eighteen for two weeks. (See Appendix for timetables.)

The secretary began asking the churches whom they wanted to minister to them, and the number of itinerant ministers became smaller and smaller. Years later (1948) the conference discontinued assigning ministers to churches and transferred the task to the churches themselves, so they could invite whom they desired.¹²

For many years the Conference remunerated all itinerant ministers. As churches became more prosperous that too was changed. Only small churches, with membership under 100, are assisted in remunerating visiting ministers.

Occasionally the *Vertreterversammlung* would call an evangelist or well-known minister to visit Manitoba churches to evangelize or expound the Word of God. The men were not necessarily from Manitoba; Abram Schierling of Alberta, for example, ministered in Manitoba two years in succession, each time for several months. Remuneration, provided by the Conference, amounted to \$35 - \$50 per month¹³ and, in the early 30s, during the depression, \$25 per month.¹⁴ To defray expenses a levy of 25 cents per member

was decided upon.¹⁵ All these monies were designated for "Home Missions," that is, work within the provincial churches.

In the first year of the Manitoba conference another item was added to the agenda: a request from the General MB Conference for support of Tabor College, in Hillsboro, Kansas. This school experienced a period of great financial difficulty and it became a question of either closing its doors or getting assistance from all conferences. The *Vertreterversammlung* decided to respond with 50 cents per member.¹⁶ The churches were to collect it and send it to the treasurer of the Manitoba Conference. Many churches whose members had just incurred huge debts by buying farms, and whose

Reiseschuld was still not liquidated, had difficulty collecting for a school few had heard of, one, moreover, in the United States, where in the mind of immigrants, all people were wealthy. The secretary had to remind them again and again to fulfill their obligation. Gradually over the years the levy for Tabor College increased to \$3 per member. The collecting of it became even more irregular and eventually it was changed to a voluntary collection.

Many of the new churches were faced with problems they were unable to resolve on their own. Their desire was to act in conformity with the whole brotherhood. Such questions were brought to the *Vertreterversammlung*, where all delegates of the convention discussed them and made decisions, often not by consensus but simply by a majority. The wisdom of the older and well-recognized ministers was usually heeded by the majority.

Here are a few of the problems discussed.

Question: Can someone be baptized without becoming a member of the church?

Answer: Baptism and reception into the church cannot be separated.

Question: Can someone attending one church upon his request be baptized by another and become a member of the first?

Answer: Only upon the recommendation of the home church.

Question: Can any member of a church baptize or must it be a minister?

Answer: The baptizer should be ordained.

Some of the churches had no ordained minister or deacon. Such churches would have to invite an ordained man.

Churches also wondered about who was allowed to lead in the communion service. The Conference then authorized a certain member of such a church to serve.

If a church wished to ordain a brother, he would have to be introduced to the *Vertreterversammlung*, and give his testimony. Only upon the approval of the convention delegates would he then be ordained by the home church.

To have all such questions debated and decided upon at the *Vertreterversammlung* became cumbersome and time-consuming. In June, 1937 the convention elected a *Fürsorgekomitee* (a committee of Reference and Counsel) to assist churches with difficult questions, discords, and issues of law. The first members of this committee were: Johann G. Wiens, Henry S. Voth, Abram H. Unruh, Heinrich P. Toews, Johann P. Braun.

The first few years of the Conference the chairman, assistant chairman,

and the secretary were always elected at the beginning of the convention and only for its duration. There was no organization that supervised matters between conventions, except for the general secretary. The secretary at the conventions was merely a recording one. When problems arose during the interval, the general secretary was burdened with them and would consult with the Winkler ministers. Eventually the Conference asked the elected chairman of the convention to serve to the beginning of the next convention. When in 1937 the *Fürsorgekomitee* (CRC), which served from one convention till the next, was elected, the moderator of the Conference also became the chairman of that committee.

In 1939 the Canadian Conference transferred the Winnipeg City Mission to the Manitoba MB Conference and a Manitoba committee was elected to serve throughout the year.¹⁷

Although reports on missionary activities at Lindal had been made to the conventions for several years, it was not until 1939 that the *Randmission* was taken over as a part of the work of the Conference. From that time on the mission workers regularly reported at great length. Reports from churches and itinerant ministers were curtailed to have time for mission reports. These engendered enthusiastic response from the delegates. There was no committee that was exclusively responsible for the work of the *Randmission*; the convention as a whole made decisions concerning it.

In 1941 the *Innere Missionskomitee* (IMK - Internal Affairs Committee) was established. Its duties were:

- To create an annual ministerial itinerary (that is to appoint the ministers for special ministry away from their home church, serving in evangelism, Bible exposition, youth work, and so on. Such itineraries had previously been made by the general secretary).
- To supervise the spiritual care of the conscientious objector camps.
- To foster Sunday school work.
- To attend to the overall spiritual growth of the churches.
- To promote outreach (known as *Randmission*).

This comprehensive committee was gradually divided into subcommittees, which in time became committees in their own right. The first of these, the *Randmission*, was created in 1943.¹⁸

As time went on conventions became increasingly busy with reports of organizations not directly responsible or supported by the Conference such as the MBCI (Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute), MBBC (Mennonite Brethren Bible College), Christian Press, *Dienst am Evangelium* (a Canadian Conference organization to support South American Mennonites), AMUS (Association of Mennonite University Students), Tabor Home (Senior Citizens Home in Morden), Camp Ames, and so on. Some of these were later included in the work of the Conference. All of them wanted the moral and financial support of the Conference. The agenda of the conventions became so crowded with these and the business items that reports of progress in mission and church had to be curtailed.

A. Spiritual Concerns

More and more, the conventions became business sessions. Frequently voices were heard protesting that a conference does not exist solely for administrative purposes, but for unifying all church efforts for spiritual growth. No one could speak against that, but administrative matters clamoured for immediate attention and the other was of necessity shelved. Again and again efforts were made to have more inspirational reports, but invariably they were shortened for business.

The few conversions in churches concerned all. With great interest the leaders of the churches watched the experiments Winkler had initiated by using "American" methods of evangelism. A.A. Kroecker reported to the IMK on these experiments in 1944 and frankly admitted that some people were carried away by emotion without experiencing a true conversion; nevertheless he felt, failure lay in the lack of follow-up rather than in the method of evangelism. This deficiency in turn was traced to ignorance of what revival really meant. Abram H. Unruh was charged by the IMK to visit the churches and lecture on the essence and character of a revival.

Here is an excerpt from a letter written by the Innere Missionskomitee to the churches, February 22, 1949:

"When we review the years 1929-49, we notice how different things are today. In the first years the churches collected annually between \$700-800. This money was used mostly for evangelism. Except for this work we had no other functions. Today beside evangelism and Bible conferences we have a large City Mission, a *Randmission*, a Bible School and we collect about \$20,000.

"But we regret that evangelism and Bible conferences today are not as often called for as they were 18 or 20 years ago. In 1931 brethren ministered for 54 weeks and the next year for 68 weeks. Let us earnestly think and pray about these things, and seek ways to remove the obstacles that hinder us."

Since the churches themselves were now responsible for invitations to evangelists and Bible teachers, and since reports from individual churches were no longer heard at the conventions, the Conference had no firm information how well this was working, or what the spiritual state of the churches, in general, was. The need for a spiritual revival was voiced repeatedly. In 1951 a questionnaire was sent out to all the churches to ascertain the spiritual pulse of the Conference.

The results were most revealing. Although the conference had arranged to remunerate special ministries for churches under 100 members, not nearly all had made use of it.¹⁹ This neglect created consternation and the Ministers and Deacons Committee felt it must plan for a greater spiritual input. The next year, 1952, Manitoba churches combined had 152 days of evangelistic meetings, using twelve evangelists, and 140 days of Bible conferences, involving twenty ministers. In 1954 the Ministers and Deacons Committee also sent out a questionnaire - a more detailed one this time - to determine the

result of its encouragement. The results are given below, Table 8.

Table 8

Results of a Questionnaire to the Churches in 1955

Question re:	Churches	
Bible conferences	17	total of 79 days
Special evangelization	9	7 conversions
Bible study and prayer	8	
Women's organizations	18	
Youth Endeavour	18	
Youth Festivals	10 4 1 4	once a year twice a year three times a year none
Song festivals	15 2 2	once a year twice a year none
Sunday school festivals	5 12 2	once a year twice a year 3 times a year
Baptismal instruction	7 12	had none
Baptisms	9 2 1 7	one two three none
House visitation	11 7	none
Lord's Supper	11 6 4	12 times annually 6 times a year 4 times a year
Foot Washing	3	occasionally

Mission festivals	11	once a year
	2	twice a year
	1	three times a year
	1	four times a year
Missionaries	14	from 8 churches
MCC workers	7	from 4 churches
Home missionaries	5	from 2 churches
Relief workers in Manitoba	2	from 1 church

Such spiritual concerns burst forth from time to time. In 1968 three brethren were given the assignment to offer their opinion, in ten minutes, on "Where should the priorities of the Manitoba MB Conference work be for the next five years or so, as I see it." All three of them, Abe Froese, David Redekop, and Len Siemens, expressed the biblical truth that the spiritual life of individual members and their commission from God had priority over anything else, and that all the work of the Conference should foster and strengthen these. The changed economic conditions, accelerating urbanization and, rapid communication and transportation, required greater alertness and more effective methods to make members aware of their obligation and to teach young people God's ways and commands. Therefore Sunday school, youth work, schools (MBCI and WBI), and student services should receive abundant encouragement in order that God's commission - the missions program and MB Communications - could be fully discharged.²¹

Although the delegates evidenced a keen disposition to realize such ideals, the difficulty of financing the Conference work developed. In spite of the increasing affluence of Mennonite Brethren members, it became more troublesome to collect the necessary monies. The Conference obligations seemed to increase more rapidly than a willingness to give. In 1969 the Committee of Reference and Counsel recommended to the convention the appointment of "a commission which would make a thorough study of the four major areas of our Conference work - MBCI, WBI, MB Communications, and Home Missions - in order to determine their effectiveness and usefulness in the light of the expenses involved."²² This recommendation was changed to the election of an independent commission, rather than one appointed by the CRC.

Reports were given a year later, in 1970. The commission of twelve had been divided into four sub-commissions, one for each area of work. These expressed some criticism regarding the "effectiveness" of each area, but all stated decisively that their study also revealed great "usefulness" of each work for Conference well-being. Home missions and MB Communications were directly employed in spreading the gospel and as such were given priority status; but Winkler Bible Institute and the MB Collegiate Institute

prepared young people to serve in these areas and the church. Without schools, it was felt, the Mennonite Brethren Church would endanger its future.²³ The Home Missions commission declared, "The activity of the individual Christian, as that of the church and the conference, must center around evangelism. We must begin at our doorstep. This is our priority. Education and training, be it at the WBI or MBCI or any other institute, can only be justified as a church program on the premise that it will aid in preparing individuals to witness and to carry out Christ's command to evangelize."²⁴

B. Incorporation of the Manitoba MB Conference

As early as 1904 the Winkler MB Church had been incorporated. In 1933 the advisability of incorporating the Conference was discussed. Such things take time and it was not until 1939 that the efforts of Jacob A. Kroeker of Winkler became a reality. The Incorporation Act was passed by the Manitoba Legislature in 1940 under the name "The Mennonite Brethren Church of Manitoba." According to its charter nine trustees or directors had to be elected, three of them retiring every year and three elected. These first nine directors are mentioned in the incorporation paper: Jacob A. Kroeker, Jacob P. Epp, Jacob P. Riediger (3 years), Herman Neufeld, Abram A. Kroeker, Abram DeFehr (2 years), J. Doerksen, J.M. Elias, C.F. Klassen (1 year). The Charter was printed in booklet form and sold for ten cents.

According to the by-laws, or constitution, there were four standing committees: Program, Home Missions, Advisory, and City Missions Committees. All of these were to hold office for one year only.

Conference officers were the chairman, vice-chairman, and secretary, with the chairman holding office "during the meeting and to the beginning of the next succeeding meeting until a new chairman is elected."

In addition to these three, a General Secretary was to be elected "to call all meetings of the Provincial Conference, arrange and supervise the program and agenda for all meetings of the Provincial Conference and generally discharge any duties assigned to him by the Provincial Conference." The general secretary seems to correspond to the position established in 1929.

The incorporation assured the Conference that they were now by law, and not only by their voluntary assemblage, a Mennonite Brethren entity. George Pries stated it this way: "The incorporation of the Mennonite Brethren in Manitoba was more than an expression of an inherent likeness; it was an affinity of hearts and minds to exhibit denominational status and faith in action as a united body of believers."²⁵

The Constitution

The Conference, now as then, is not bound by a rigid, unbending constitution. The 1940 by-laws were hardly in circulation when changes were made to them. The Conference is a living organism and as time progresses and needs change, committees, and positions can be added or dropped as re-

quired; the constitution is a servant, not a master. Only one check is provided: major changes require a notice of motion for disposition at the next convention.

Therefore, as needed, the Conference created a committee for youth, to encourage a sustained effort, for church music, to foster singing in worship services and Sunday school, and improve the quality of singing in choirs, for the ministers and deacons, in 1942, to establish greater uniformity in teaching throughout the province. It also divided Manitoba into five districts in 1944 in order to more adequately serve all churches.

In 1948 it was decided to hold only one convention annually. In 1950 a Christian Education Committee of seven was established combining the areas of Sunday school, youth, and music and to coordinate church education.

So many changes had been made that it became necessary to update the constitution. The task was assigned to the Incorporation Committee of nine members (actually it was the directory, or the trustees). The new constitution was adopted in 1953. Every point had been presented in the churches, and these were then discussed, accepted, or modified at the convention meeting.

This constitution provided for nine standing committees - Reference and Counsel, Trustees, Home Missions, School and Education, Winkler Bible School, Relief, Revision, City Mission, Program - and four non-standing ones - Sunday school, Youth, Music, Ministers and Deacons.

The office of the general secretary was abrogated and his duties taken over by the executive.

The purpose of the Conference was not stated anywhere except for Article XI which declared briefly "The Conference acknowledges its responsibility to preach the Gospel to all people."

The Internal Affairs Committee (*Innere Missionskomitee-IMK*), which before encompassed all the spiritual work, became the Home Missions Committee for *Randmission*, Tent Mission, Colportage, DVBS, and all missionary work in Manitoba except in Winnipeg.

The Christian Education Committee had its duties expanded and was renamed School and Education Committee. A persuasive rationale was offered for this change: "The Conference acknowledges its sacred duty to support Christian training as it is carried on in families, church, public schools and Bible Schools. More specifically, the Conference acknowledges its duties, to offer its youth the opportunity to train for vocations or professions under positively Christian influences and in the spirit of our forefathers. The committee strives to train young people in the biblical faith and to strengthen their moral life, in order that they will retain the spiritual inheritance with which God entrusted our church. This includes the support of the WBS, and in the future, the possible taking over, establishing, and supporting of other schools. These goals require an Education Committee consisting of the principal for the WBS, the chairman of Sunday School, Youth, Music committees, and the principals of the institutions that eventually may be taken over by the Conference. Its duties would be to coordinate education within the Conference."

This argument confidently looked forward to the acceptance of the Menonite Brethren Collegiate Institute.

A constitution committee, to monitor convention proceedings as well as modify the constitution when changes were contemplated, was also elected.

Major changes were undertaken in 1957. The Home Missions and City missions committees were merged under the name: Home Missions Committee. Its duties were supervision, care, and management expansion of all mission endeavours in Manitoba, that is, "Every kind of activity for the expansion of evangelism outside of our churches."

At the same time, because of frequent complaints of committees interfering with each other, a Coordinating Committee was established. It would coordinate Conference work by regulating the annual calendar of events of the Conference and its districts, seeking to avoid duplication of activities, and assisting when problems arose. Although this committee was elected on a trial basis for one year, it continued for several.

In 1963 an official proposal to make the MBCI (MB Collegiate Institute in Winnipeg) part of the work of the Conference was brought before the Conference. After much discussion, some opposition of country churches which could not make use of the school as easily as the city churches, and some apprehension as to the cost to the Conference, the MBCI became the responsibility of the Manitoba Conference in 1964. The School and Education Committee of the 1953 Constitution was resurrected and both the Bible school at Winkler (WBI) and the Winnipeg high school were placed under it. It began with twenty-three members; in 1967 it changed to twenty-seven and in 1982 to twenty-four.

A revised constitution was accepted in 1967. This one had eight standing committees: Committee of Reference and Counsel, Board of Directors, Missions Committee, Board of Education, Auditing Committee, Building Committee, Radio Committee, and Constitution Committee. Again Sunday School, Youth, Music, and Ministers and Deacons Committees were non-standing, with the first three combined under the Christian Education Committee.

In 1982, because of some fundamental changes, the incorporation Act of 1940 was amended. It expanded the objectives of the Conference, in Section 2, to include "the communication of the Christian religion by the spoken, printed, or electronically recorded and broadcast word, the establishment and operation of schools, including the granting of appropriate diplomas and degrees, and the provision of health and social welfare programs, according to the religious belief of the members of the corporation." A few other minor changes were made, section 13 was repealed and substituted with "the head office of the corporation shall be in the city of Winnipeg, in the Province of Manitoba or any other place, in Manitoba, as the Board of Directors may direct." These amendments received royal assent June 30, 1982 by an act of the Manitoba Legislature and the signature of the Lieutenant-Governor.²⁶

The By-laws received a thorough revision. The responsibilities of the Conference were emphasized by placing them at the beginning of the constitu-

tion, Article V. These were: Worship and spiritual fellowship, mission, mutual concern and spiritual assistance within the member churches, strengthening of spiritual life of the member churches, nursing of the sick, education within Manitoba, welfare and relief, evangelization within Manitoba.

This last Constitution has eleven standing committees: Committee of Reference and Counsel, Board of Directors, Board of Mission and Church Extension, Board of Educational Institutions, Board of Communications, Ministers and Deacons Committee, Board of Christian Education, Personnel Committee, Building Committee, Student Services Committee, Constitution Committee.

C. The Northern District of the Manitoba MB Conference

The establishment of five churches in Northern Manitoba in less than ten years created a need of "tying together the existing groups into a region of districts" (Nikkel). Many of the problems of the churches were common to all, and there were activities they could do together, such as calling an evangelistic team north to serve not only one church but all of them, developing extension programs, administering a Bible camp, and building a strong northern evangelical identity. A number of these activities had already been tried with success.

At the Northern Leadership Conference, November 22 and 23, 1981, in Leaf Rapids, the pastors of the five churches organized the Northern District of the Manitoba MB Conference. Jake Bergen was elected chairman of the district. Its function, by common consent, included:

- the Northern Leadership Conference,
- the Northern Bible Conference on the May long weekend at Simon House Bible Camp,
- the operation of two camping programs by the Northern Camp Committee, which included the pastor and a representative of each of the five churches,
- other cooperative ventures: youth retreats, Christian Education seminars, itinerary of ministerial visits.

D. Women's Conference of Manitoba MB Churches²⁷

From the very beginning of MB churches in Manitoba, the women of the churches came together for fellowship and support of various mission charities. Because each church was on its own in these activities, efforts were sometimes haphazard; there was a need to coordinate the work and to inform the various women's groups of mission requirements and Mennonite Central Committee projects.

Mrs. Elizabeth DeFehr and Mrs. Elizabeth Fast realized this necessity; for many years Mrs. Fast hosted an annual afternoon meeting of the presidents of women's organizations for a discussion of what women of the churches could do to aid missions and MCC. Later Mrs. Fast organized public evening meet-

ings open to all Mennonite Brethren. These were always well attended and became a profitable source of aid to missions.

The Committee of Reference and Counsel felt that there should be a firmer organization of the sisters of the churches in their work in the Kingdom of God, and liaison with MB Conference for joint projects. Upon the request of the CRC, I.W. Redekopp called the presidents of the women's church societies to a meeting March 9, 1967, to organize an official Manitoba MB Women's Conference. Its functions would be instruction, sharing of ideas, prayer and practical expression of faith in missions and witnessing.

It was also decided that such a conference should meet simultaneously with the Manitoba MB Conference, and that every church send two delegates to it. The result of the provisional election by ballot was Helen Doerksen, chairman, Mary Krueger, vice-chairman, and Helen Huebner, secretary. The minutes of this meeting were presented to the CRC for approval the next day.

The first women's conference met June 10, 1967. At that time the executive was enlarged to six members. The executive was to keep in touch with the women's groups throughout the year, so that the needs of the various societies would be known and met. It acted as a clearing committee, providing lists of mission projects, suitable dramas, study material, book lists, and program ideas.

The slate of officers elected was Peggy Regehr, chairman, Anne Friesen, vice chairman, Helen Huebner, secretary, Helen Doerksen, Katie Huebert. The sixth member was always a member of the host church of the annual convention.

Years later when women were elected as delegates to the Manitoba MB Conference the Women's Conference was scheduled as an all-day Saturday meeting apart from the convention. It is now usually held in April.

The Women's Conference elects four women to the MCC Women's Executive. They serve for three years and keep the church groups informed of MCC needs. These church societies are actively involved in sewing blankets, layettes, and school kits, and in making of soap.

The Conference is also involved with the World Day of Prayer.

Says Helen Doerksen: "Women look forward to their annual Conference Day. It is good to be together, to be inspired anew, to take home new ideas to try out, to feel we are part of the church, and a part of building the Kingdom of God.

NOTES Chapter 8

1. *Winkler M.B. Minutes.* 1913.

2. *Winkler M.B. Minutes.* 1913.

3. Epiphany (Heilige-drei-Koenige Fest), January 6, was for many years not only a religious holiday for the Mennonite Brethren, with church services, but also a day of remembrance of the break-away of the M.B. Church from the Mennonite Church in 1860.

4. *Winkler M.B. Minutes.* 1926.

5. *Winkler M.B. Minutes.* 1927.

6. *Winkler M.B. Minutes*. 1928.
7. *Winkler M.B. Minutes*. July 19, 1929.
8. A church close to the Manitoba border.
9. This church is mentioned only in the Canadian Conference minutes. There is no additional information anywhere about this church, its ministers, number of members, dissolution. According to information from people living today in the Winnipegosis area there were only 5 to 6 M.B. families, who later moved to find "greener pastures."
10. *Winkler M.B. Minutes*. 1929.
11. *Manitoba M.B. Conference Minutes*. 1932.
12. *Manitoba M.B. Conference Minutes*. 1948.
13. *Manitoba M.B. Conference Minutes*. 1929.
14. *Manitoba M.B. Conference Minutes*. 1931.
15. *Manitoba M.B. Conference Minutes*. 1931.
16. *Manitoba M.B. Conference Minutes*. 1930.
17. *Minutes of the Canadian Conference*. 1939.
18. *Manitoba M.B. Conference Minutes*. 1941.
19. *Manitoba M.B. Conference Minutes*. 1953, pp. 9-10.
20. *Manitoba M.B. Conference Minutes*. 1955, pp. 10-11.
21. *Manitoba M.B. Conference Minutes*. 1968, pp. 70-79.
22. *Manitoba M.B. Conference Minutes*. 1969, p. 23.
23. *Manitoba M.B. Conference Minutes*. 1970, pp. 36-47; 59-64; 75-89; 102-111.
24. *Manitoba M.B. Conference Minutes*. 1970, p. 103.
25. *Manitoba M.B. Conference Minutes*. 1940.
26. The Corporation Act of 1940 required all churches to deposit their church property titles in a Conference "safe" at Winkler. Since the Conference office has been moved to Winnipeg the "safe" has also been transferred to the city. The reason for depositing all titles in the conference "safe" is simply that the local churches are not incorporated (except Winkler), and all church property is registered in the name of the M.B. Church of Manitoba (Constitution, Article XXII, Sec. 2b). Another practical reason is the fact that local trustees of a church often change, and the titles may be lost. Then also, in case of a church's dissolution, "all real and personal property of such a church shall immediately vest in the Mennonite Brethren Church of Manitoba" (Article XXII, Sec. 5g). In such an event the Conference's administrative body is responsible to administer the property, and the title must be available.
27. *Manitoba M.B. Conference Minutes*. March 9, 1967, June 9, 1967 and Notes by Helen Doerksen.

Part IV

DO NOT SPARE; LENGTHEN
YOUR CORDS (Is.54:2)

Chapter 9

OUTREACH EFFORTS OF THE MANITOBA MB CONFERENCE

A. Winnipeg City Mission

When the Canadian MB Conference transferred the Winnipeg City Mission to the Manitoba Conference in 1939 the mission, because of internal disagreements, was in a crisis situation.

In 1913 the Canadian MB Conference (then the Northern District Conference) acceded to the appeal of Johann Warkentin of Winkler to send a missionary to Winnipeg. At that time Winnipeg had a small MB Church of thirty-two members, mostly of Swabians and Franconians who had emigrated from the Volga area in Russia, meeting in the North-End Chapel and affiliated with Winkler and ministered to by Winkler preachers.¹

William Bestvater was sent to Winnipeg by the Canadian Conference not merely to pastor the church, but to establish a city mission.² This he did with great success. Anna Thiessen was added to the work two years later. She started girls clubs and women's sewing circles.³ After eight years Bestvater left and Erdman Nikkel came to take his place. He stayed only a few years and left before a replacement could be found.

In 1925 Cornelius N. Hiebert was assigned to continue the work of the city mission. He had been a colporteur and an evangelist. God had given him the gift of directing any conversation to spiritual matters, and doing it in so natural and tactful a way that it seldom caused offense. He had an intense burden for people. Anna Thiessen called him "*ein begabter Seelengewinner und ein gewaltiger Evangelist*"⁴ (a gifted soul winner and a powerful evangelist). Hiebert had an absorbing interest in the physical and spiritual well-being of people. All these qualities contributed to an effective missionary ministry.

The coming of the *Russländer* immigrants in the 1920s drastically changed the work of the city mission. Now the Hieberts' time was taken up by work with the immigrants, and outreach into the community could not be done, ex-

cept for faithful visitations to hospitals and similar institutions.

According to the Canadian Conference the North-End Chapel was a mission; it had been that since 1913, and was now supported as such. The congregation, grown to 300 members, most of them Mennonite Brethren immigrants from Russia objected to being classified as a mission. It argued that it had been an MB church since 1909 and that the city mission had been added to the church in 1913. The church, therefore, was not an outgrowth of the missionary efforts; rather, the reverse was true. The church had helped to support the mission from the very beginning. For instance, when Bestvater arrived the then thirty-two member church had collected \$137 for the work.⁵ This practice was continued throughout the years. In fact, the mission leaned on the church, not only for financial support but for personnel — Sunday school teachers, singers, club leaders, and visitation teams.

The brotherhood, by and large, realized that, since the coming of the immigrants in the 1920s, the North-End Chapel had become, in all aspects, more of a regular church than a city mission; that city missionary C.N. Hiebert was of necessity the leader of the church, and that he was engaged and supported by the Canadian Conference. Rumblings were heard that the Conference was paying the salary of the Winnipeg church leader. These complaints created a general negative attitude toward the support of the mission. The country churches, struggling financially, felt that the Winnipeg church was more well-to-do than they were, and wondered why it should be supported by the Conference. Others bemoaned the fact that the city mission work was being neglected, because the missionary was too busy with the church. On the other hand the church objected that Hiebert was often absent doing evangelistic work elsewhere on the continent.

In 1936 the Canadian Conference gave the Hieberts a year of furlough for recuperation, which both of them greatly needed. In the same year the Conference also enlarged the City Mission Committee to six members, with three to be from Manitoba in order that these could have a closer contact with the work in Winnipeg.⁶ The Conference also advised the new committee to work toward a separation of mission and church; that is, the missionary should not at the same time be the leader of the church. Since this change would be enacted while the Hieberts were on furlough, the North-End church felt somewhat uneasy about C.N. Hiebert's reaction. For that reason the church wisely appointed Frank F. Isaak as leader provisionally. The next year the Conference engaged the Hieberts for six months only, because the treasury was depleted, permitting him to do evangelistic work the other six months. This decision necessitated the election of a leader.

Upon Hiebert's return to Winnipeg he was faced with the accomplished fact that he was not the leader of the church, but confined to mission work only. He did not covet the leadership as such, but was concerned about the progress of the church as well as mission work. How could church and mission occupy the same building (which actually belonged to the mission) and each be given its proper share of attention? Hiebert tried hard to cooperate with the church leadership, but in his estimation a successful work could only

be done if the missionary was also the leader of the church.

This problem was openly discussed at the 1938 Canadian Conference held in Winnipeg. The conclusion after a heated and protracted debate was, that mission and church must cooperate. The chairman of the city mission board, J.P. Wiebe, summarized, "A correct, mutual attitude between mission and church is an absolute necessity. Although every church, in its true sense, is also a missionary church, a church that is in direct contact with the city mission, must be even more so. Mutual consideration of each other is very necessary."⁷

The 1938 convention sparked a flurry of agitated discussions within the church, which obstructed the progress of the work and impeded cooperation. Winnipeg now had a city mission with Hiebert as missionary and a church with an elected leader in the same building, a chapel built with monies collected all over Canada and U.S.A.

F.F. Isaak and C.N. Hiebert had a meeting, discussed the problem prayerfully and issued a joint statement which they called "An Explanation."

"As leaders of the church and the mission we feel the responsibility as well as the duty to exert all our influence to pacify the people and direct the joint work into calm waters again, in order that God's pleasure can bless the work.

"To achieve this goal, we consider it necessary to offer the church the following explanation:

"1. We believe that the church, whose first task is to proclaim the Gospel of saving grace to a lost world, should stand like a man behind the work of the city mission. We also believe that the majority within the church are striving toward this goal, but regret that a few, by ill-considered remarks, have apparently given the impression that this is not so."

(At this point F.F. Isaak made a warm appeal to the church to support the mission.)

"2. We also believe that the work of the city mission must be carried on in full accord with the church, if the Lord is to bless it. If there is no full harmony or if there is possibly a strained relationship, a successful and blessed work is unthinkable."

Both of them, then, committed themselves to put aside any differences or friction. Only if agreement were impossible would they take the matter to the city mission committee and the church council. They wanted to avoid strictly any rumours of discord or dissatisfaction.

C.N. Hiebert then made a personal statement:

"I would now, as leader of the city mission, declare, that I fully endorse the decision of the City Mission Committee to relinquish the leadership of the church. Because of that I appeal to all brethren and sisters, in the interest of our joint work, to discontinue remarks concerning the question of our leadership and to stand unitedly behind the church leader. I repeat what I have said previously (For me it is not a question concerning church leadership), and for this reason this matter should never be mentioned again."⁸

This "Explanation", signed by both brethren, was read to the church on October 3, 1938. The appeal was not without success and the work continued

relatively smoothly for a while. The church's worship services were held in the morning and the mission had its services on Sunday evenings. Any weekday services were arranged by mutual agreement. Unfortunately there were still a few members who created unrest and aggravated a contentious matter.

In 1939 the Canadian Conference transferred responsibility for city missions to the respective provinces. Manitoba elected six brethren: three from the province, three from the North-End Chapel and added the leaders of the mission and the church. The members were: J.A. Kroeker (Winkler, a member almost from the beginning of the city mission), H.P. Toews (Arnaud), J. Epp (Steinbach), and from the church: C.A. DeFehr, H. Wiebe, F. Klassen and the two leaders, C.N. Hiebert and F.F. Isaak. According to the reasoning and understanding of the new board, mission and church must cooperate. The mission's responsibility was to bring the gospel to the unchurched and not concern itself with baptism and reception into the church. That was to be the responsibility of the church. The board also wanted a missionary who would be at his task the whole year. If this would not work, the best way to resolve the impasse would be to transfer all mission work to the church.

C.N. Hiebert could not agree to this. In his conviction evangelism and baptism belonged together. The difficulty continued for more than two years. The board called a larger meeting of all the MB ministers of Manitoba to discuss the matter, but it resolved nothing.

This distressing problem was studied again at the Manitoba spring *Vertreterversammlung*, but no solution was found. Soon after the convention C.N. Hiebert called a few brethren of the Board and aired his concerns.

A few brethren had made derogatory remarks about the original members of the church, the Swabians, and this had created a rift which hampered the work.

In the beginning the mission had a children's meeting on Sunday afternoons in English for children of the community. Since the church wanted these meetings in German, they had to be discontinued.

The Work was limited to hospital and house visitations, and no English services and expanded evangelistic meetings could be held.

Invitations to come to mission services Sunday evenings fell on deaf ears, for the public conception was that the invitation was to a Mennonite church rather than to a mission.

Communion services were held on Sunday evenings and occasionally the church membership was asked to stay for a brief meeting. This hindered counselling people looking for spiritual help.

Before the church held a prayer meeting Friday mornings to pray for the unconverted. Only those who were free at that time attended. Many brethren who were free never attended and also were disapproving. So these had to be canceled.

City mission work was not really supported by the church or the Board; it was merely tolerated.⁹

All this weighed heavily upon Hiebert, and he could not work as he desired. Brethren from the rural churches had told him they could not support

the Winnipeg work if it continued like this. Even American Mennonite Brethren who had generously supported the work had stopped their aid. Hiebert particularly deplored the decreasing attendance on Sunday evenings. A number of the Swabians had left the church.

The Mission Board presented the whole matter again to the convention in the fall of 1940. Their statement to the Conference read: "It is not a matter of clarifying misunderstandings between brethren or justifying one or the other; it is not a matter of accusation against one or more brethren; the reason for discord is the divergent understanding concerning the work areas, work limits, and work methods. If guidelines for the city mission had been created earlier, the shock to the work would have been spared.

"Now the Board does not want to accept the responsibility to continue according to the directives once received from the Conference (Canadian), and to endanger the whole mission work (as stated by C.N. Hiebert and other brethren), but the Board desires clear decisions on principle from this conference in order to be able to guide this important work."¹⁰

C.N. Hiebert was prepared to rent a hall and continue the mission work there. No action was agreed upon, only the admonition that C.N. Hiebert and the church find a way to agree.

At the 1941 convention C.N. Hiebert was still convinced that there must be a complete separation of church and mission. The Board tried to exert its influence towards an agreement but to no avail. When Hiebert was pressed whether the Board could depend on his continuing the work, he declined. Under the circumstances he could not work, he said. The 1941 minutes expressed hopelessness: "This is a sad chapter in our Winnipeg mission's history. It had wrought great harm to the work of the mission as well as the church. This confirms again that the church and mission cannot work together. This system has outlived itself and is not applicable today anymore."¹¹

To the Conference, Hiebert reported, "Mission and church should be separate in order that people of other confessions could be reached. The North-End Chapel has been built with monies from many churches and people in Canada and U.S. specifically for missionary work. Today the church takes precedence and there is not much of an outreach any more. I love the church I love the mission. I thank you for all the love shown me, but I cannot continue to work under these circumstances."¹²

C.N. Hiebert had ministered in Winnipeg for fifteen years, during the most exciting time of the mission's expansion. To the original congregation at Burrows and Andrews and later to thousands of Mennonite immigrants passing through Winnipeg, and those who settled there, he was a spiritual father, teaching, encouraging, admonishing, directing them into deeper fellowship with the Lord. Many a young man, many a working girl, many parents worried about how to provide for their families during the depression and forced to send their daughters to the city to find employment, received guidance and encouragement from this man of God. The city mission had been God's provision for the immigrants of the 1920s, with brother Hiebert in a crucial

position. He was not merely admired, he was loved. An appropriate farewell was arranged for the Hieberts and due recognition was given him by the Board and by the church.

William Falk became city missionary under the express arrangement that his work be outside the church, but with the active support of the three Winnipeg churches. The *Mädchenheim* (the girls' home away from home) would remain the spiritual and financial responsibility of the North-End Church. Falk had to seek and find new areas of work. He continued with hospital visitation and now ventured into senior citizens' homes, personal care homes, and prisons.

He also immediately began "Sunday school" on weekdays wherever there was an opportunity, "in private homes, in churches, immigration halls, and other places."¹³ Together with his helpers (there were many mission-minded people in the three churches), he had up to 350 children a week: English, French, Ukrainian, German, Jewish, Black, and Indian children. In this way, the homes were reached. Services were conducted in the Union Gospel Mission, personal care homes, Institute for the Blind, and even in Catholic institutions. He held short services during the noon lunch break in the CPR and CNR workshops. Many heard the gospel. For two-and-a-half years Falk, together with the male choir, conducted services in the Headingly prison. Many doors were opened to the eager inquiry of the dedicated missionary. And what joy was his to see sinners humbly accept the grace of God!

Already in 1941 the City Mission Board had suggested that the North-End Church buy the building on College Avenue. It was not until 1949 that the church did so. With consideration of the expenses the church had borne in the upkeep and improvements of the building, the building originally costing \$17,000, was sold to them for \$7,000.¹⁴ The Canadian Conference, the owner, gave that money to the Winnipeg City Mission, which bought a chapel on 406 Logan Avenue from the Swedish Baptist Church. Now the city missionary had a place to gather the believers and such that were interested. The chapel was renamed "The Gospel Light Mission." The enthusiasm for the work of the mission seemed contagious and Falk always had willing, supportive helpers. Sunday school attendance of the Logan Avenue Mission soon reached eight-three because the South-End mission Sunday school was incorporated into the Gospel Light Sunday School. A short time after that attendance reached a hundred students with fifteen teachers.

"Hobby Clubs," organized by Frank Peters, were attended by up to forty-five boys and girls. A few of them were sent to a mission camp during the summer, and a number decided to follow Jesus.

Other evangelistic attempts were made in the city. Entirely on his own initiative Heinrich Hiebert began mission work among the Jews in the North-End of Winnipeg, distributing tracts, selling or giving away Bibles, and witnessing of the love of God. He continued this work until far past his eightieth birthday. The Manitoba Conference acknowledged his efforts with a small annual honorarium.¹⁵

In 1951 the city mission began a radio program in the German language

over Winnipeg station CKY with speaker William Falk. This program was also aired from stations in Saskatchewan and North Dakota. Falk resigned from the city mission in 1952 and accepted the pastorship of the North Kil-donan MB Church, but he continued his radio program for some time longer.

John M. Schmidt from Alberta, already well known as the speaker of the English "Gospel Light Hour", became the new city missionary.

In his 1955 report to the Manitoba Conference Schmidt mentioned the many "missionaries" who assisted him in the various avenues of work. These came from the three Mennonite Brethren churches of Winnipeg and from the MB Bible College. He counted 300 such "missionaries." The Logan Sunday school had 130-150 children every Sunday, and fifty were sent to a Christian camp for ten days in the summer through the sacrificial giving of mission supporters. Elsie Falk and Margaret Voth started a girls club, and many others, too many to name, were willing to spend their vacation, or their evenings, or their Sunday afternoons to bring the gospel to children and adults.¹⁶

Another Sunday school was held at the Union Gospel Mission in the after-noon. There were ten classes, 130 children, and thirteen teachers, recruited from the MBBC. Such a Sunday afternoon operation required many cars to transport the children. There were always willing men who served the Lord in that way.

Every Wednesday evening there was also a service at Union Gospel Mis-sion and after the program an opportunity for personal work with individuals who attended. The students called it "Midnight Watch." As a group they were able to communicate in seven different languages. This "Watch" was carried on from October to the end of May. Conversions were registered.¹⁷

In 1957 the Manitoba Conference created a single committee for the *Randmission* and the city mission, named "Missions Committee," but popularly known as "Home Missions." All outreach efforts of the Manitoba Conference were now under one umbrella. The election for the first Missions Committee was carried out according to the constitution's division of Manitoba into five districts. J.H. Quiring was elected as chairman of that committee.¹⁸

At the time of the merger of the committees of city mission and *Randmis-sion* the Logan Mission Church was accepted by the Conference as an MB Church with forty-one members. John Schmidt, the city missionary, con-tinued as pastor of the church.

For several years the Logan church collected a fund for a new building. In 1959 it bought a church in Fort Rouge¹⁹ and all baptized members moved there. John Schmidt resigned to devote all his time to the radio ministry.

For a few months the city mission work was without a worker. College stu-dents served the Logan mission until Rudie Willms was engaged in 1960. When Willms became city missionary, he asked for a job description. The newly organized Missions Committee's terse answer was "The city - that's your work!"²⁰ He continued for a while in the time-honored methods of his predecessors, but eventually concentrated mostly on evangelizing the im-mediate community surrounding the church, having clubs and Sunday school

in the church and conducting regular Wednesday evening services at Union Gospel Mission. The hospitals, senior citizens homes, and personal care homes were regularly visited by Rev. Cornelius Wall.²¹ He was a kindly, elderly gentleman with much experience in counselling.

Sunday school at 405 Logan increased from seven classes to fifteen. The church became too small for the large attendance and the Logan Neighbourhood Hall was rented to accommodate five classes. A correspondence course for children was initiated and seventy children enrolled the first year.²² The next year enrollment reached 300. Again a sufficient number of concerned members from Winnipeg MB churches assisted in the teaching.

In 1963, four believers were baptized, and in the same year the congregation became a church with twenty-six charter members. Because of the crowded conditions at the Logan Church, the group searched for more adequate facilities. A church on Alexander Avenue was bought, with the help of the Conference, in 1964.²³ By 1965 the new premises were ready for occupation. The Logan church was renamed Salem MB Church.

After forty-two years of faithful, much appreciated service to the Menonite working girls in Winnipeg, Anna Thiessen, because of age and ill health, resigned in 1959. There was no urgent need of such a service any longer, and the Conference sold the *Mädchenheim*, and provided life-long support for *Schwester Anna* "so that she will not be in need and can live without worry."²⁴

With the closing of the *Mädchenheim*, the Logan mission becoming a church, the discontinuance of the work at Union Gospel Mission (individual churches took it over), and the retirement of Cornelius Wall, the city mission work, as it had been known since 1913, came to a gradual and inconspicuous termination. The city of Winnipeg had undergone tremendous changes in the meantime. The great influx into the city of Canadian Indians, many different Asiatics, and South and Central Americans has made Winnipeg a multicultural center. New mission methods, new procedures, new approaches were required. A prodigious task awaited the mission board.

The areas that received immediate attention were prison chaplaincy and hospital visitation.

In the early days of city mission work the missionary, with the assistance of singing groups, had served the Headingly prison sporadically. In 1964 John Wall, the pastor of the Fort Garry MB Church, served once a month. To minister to prisoners not only with a message and songs but with personal counselling also, the Missions Committee engaged John Quiring for the chaplaincy (two thirds of his time) as well as for the work of hospital visitation (one-third of his time).²⁵ Quiring was soon recognized as an excellent worker and became the assistant chaplain to the provincial prison chaplain. This involvement prevented him from visiting the hospitals, and that task remained dormant for a long time. Quiring's work was very time-consuming. His assignments (Headingly, Vaughan Street Detention Centre, Portage la Prairie prison and prison camps) kept him very busy. He reported in 1969, for instance, that he had given approximately 1,700 interviews and counselling

sessions, forty-eight prison chapel services, marital counselling to fifteen inmate families, and continuous follow-up of fifteen released persons. He distributed approximately 800 articles of clothes, supplied by the churches. Furthermore he visited twenty-five churches to acquaint them with his work.²⁶

A number of Mennonite Brethren families became involved in this work, assisting in the care of the prisoners' families. Ex-offenders were sometimes employed by Christian businessmen to give them a new start in life. In 1969 two ex-prisoners were baptized and joined the MB Church.²⁷

The following report to the conference gives insight into Quiring's work.²⁸

"It is 1:00 p.m. An RCMP officer calls the Court to order in the Municipal Hall at Lac du Bonnet. The accused is asked to come forward. He is a married man and father of nine children. He has an excellent work record and has held his job for the past 23 years. His wife who has been a bundle of nerves since the offence was committed, sits next to me on the front bench. The charge is read and the accused pleads guilty to the charge.

"The defence counsel and I were permitted to speak on behalf of the accused. After this the magistrate sentences the accused to one year at Headingly.

"Upon hearing the sentence, the wife of the accused buried her face in her hands and gave vent to her pent-up feelings with loud and persistent sobs that filled the entire court room. Complete silence reigned for the next several minutes except for her sobbing and pleas not to take her husband from her and the children. I finally escorted her to an adjacent room where, once more, she broke out crying and began to shake uncontrollably. Her agony and misery increased as her husband was escorted to a waiting police cruiser.

"Later that afternoon, I had the difficult task of breaking the sad news to eight of their nine children. Upon hearing what had happened to his father, the second oldest boy started crying and went outside. We could hear him crying above the sobs of the other children.

"After spending an hour with the family, I left for home with a heavy and broken heart, as the emotional ties with this family were very close by now. Furthermore, I was fully aware of the heavy and uncalled for responsibilities that had been placed upon the shoulders of this wife and mother."

B. The Gospel Light Mission of Brandon

In 1954 a request came to the Conference from the delegates of Justice and Griswold to begin a mission in Brandon. Many of the young people, members of the churches, had found work in Brandon and the parents were concerned about their children where they would worship and where they would receive the right kind of spiritual care. No decision was made at that time, but the matter was referred to the Winnipeg City Mission Committee.²⁹

This committee investigated the possibilities in Brandon and engaged Abram J. Froese of Boissevain to begin to gather the MB young people who worked there.³⁰ Because this organization was a branch of the Winnipeg City

Mission, it also became known as the Gospel Light Mission. Services were held on Sunday evenings; Wednesday was prayer meeting and Bible study time. The gatherings in the homes became too crowded. Through the efforts of A.J. Froese the Hillside Mission Hall was made available for Sunday afternoons. Here the young people had their worship services and conducted a mission Sunday school. Singing groups were organized to serve in the hospital and senior citizens homes. During the summer Froese would return to his farm, but minister in the mission on Sundays. In 1956 the Lawrence Warkentin became the full-time mission workers.³¹

A larger hall, the Foresters' Hall, was rented. Now services and Sunday school were held in the mornings. In 1957 the mission group built its own meeting place (Fourth St. and Hill Ave.) with a seating capacity of 250.³² Under Warkentin's leadership Sunday school increased to nine classes; three hobby clubs and two kindergartens were organized. Outreach was done in several senior citizens homes and the General Hospital.

In 1960 the Gospel Light Mission organized into the Brandon MB Church with twenty-six members.³³ The previous year two lots had been donated to the mission in the Riverview area, a suburb of a thousand homes and no church. It seemed an excellent spot to begin another mission. The conference assigned \$5,000 for a Sunday school building (the money was part of the sale of the Maria-Martha *Mädchenheim* in Winnipeg). Early in 1960 Sunday school and clubs were begun at this new mission. Brandon MB members served there — one of the regular helpers was Martha Stobbe.³⁴ The children came entirely from non-Christian homes.

The Brandon MB Church continued to do mission work in its immediate church area and also in Riverview. Morning Sunday school and worship services were begun at the Riverview mission in 1962, with George Reimer engaged for a year as a full-time worker.³⁵ Then in 1965 the Brandon MB Church took over full responsibility of the mission.³⁶

Notes Chapter 9

1. *Minutes of the Elmwood M.B. Church.*
2. *Minutes of the Northern District M.B. Conference.* 1913.
3. Anna Thiessen, *Die Stadtmission in Winnipeg.* (Winnipeg, MB: Regehr's Printing, Winnipeg, 1955), pp. 13-20.
4. Horch, Esther. *C.N. Hiebert Was My Father.* (Winnipeg: The Christian Press, 1979), p. 72.
5. Thiessen, F.C. "Letter of Explanation to the Conference," *Minutes of the Manitoba M.B. Conference Executive.*
6. *Minutes of the Canadian M.B. Conference.* 1936.
7. *Minutes of the Canadian M.B. Conference.* 1938.
8. *Minutes of the Elmwood M.B. Church.* 1938.
9. Report given by the City Mission Board to the *Vertreterversammlung* at Niverville, 1940.
10. *Minutes of the Manitoba Vertreterversammlung.* 1940.
11. *Minutes of the Manitoba M.B. Conference.* June 14, 1941.
12. *Manitoba Minutes.* June 14, 1941.
13. *Manitoba Minutes.* 1941.
14. *Manitoba Minutes.* 1949.
15. *Manitoba Minutes.* 1952, p. 58.
16. *Manitoba Minutes.* 1955, p. 28.
17. *Manitoba Minutes.* 1956, p. 30.
18. *Manitoba Minutes.* 1957, p. 7.
19. *Manitoba Minutes.* 1959, p. 50.
20. Interview. Rudie Willms, April, 1983.
21. *Minutes of the Manitoba M.B. Conference.* 1962, p. 17.
22. *Manitoba Minutes.* 1962, p. 34.
23. *Manitoba Minutes.* 1964, p. 64.
24. *Manitoba Minutes.* 1959, p. 39.
25. *Manitoba Minutes.* 1965, p. 37.
26. *Manitoba Minutes.* 1969, p. 53.
27. *Manitoba Minutes.* 1969, p. 53.
28. *Manitoba Minutes.* 1968, p. 85.
29. *Manitoba Minutes.* 1954, p. 65.
30. *Manitoba Minutes.* 1954, p. 13.
31. *Manitoba Minutes.* 1956, p. 16.
32. *Manitoba Minutes.* 1958, p. 10.
33. *Manitoba Minutes.* 1960, p. 37.
34. *Manitoba Minutes.* 1960, p. 26 and 1961, p. 34.
35. *Manitoba Minutes.* 1963, p. 25.
36. *Manitoba Minutes.* 1966, p. 27.

Chapter 10

RANDMISSION AND HOME MISSION

A. First Timid Efforts in Evangelism

In the early years of the Manitoba Mennonite Brethren Church evangelistic work was conducted solely among the Mennonites of the East and West Reserves. The baptized believers were added either to the Winkler Church or to the two newly established ones, Grossweide or Kronsart. As time went on evangelism became not so much an organized effort of the church, as of the individual member who won his relatives and friends for Christ.

With the coming of the immigrants in the 1920s church activities were directed more in settling the newcomers and establishing worship communities. Most immigrants were scattered over Manitoba, away from Mennonite reserves. Their neighbours were English, Ukrainian, Dutch, Scandinavian, and so on. Very soon their Christian conscience asserted itself and urged them to bring the gospel to the people around them. Yet it took many years before anything constructive was undertaken. The main hindrances were the struggle to make a living and the ignorance of the English language.

Several events aroused the churches to take up the smoldering torch of their responsibilities again. In the late 1920s the Rev. J. Lloyd Hunter, superintendent of the Canadian Sunday School Mission, had begun short-term vacation Bible schools in Manitoba. He recruited a number of young people from the Winkler Bible School. The first ones were Nettie and Lena Kroeker. They attended the Canadian Sunday School Mission seminar at Elim Chapel, Winnipeg, in 1928 and then took over the DVBS at Rosenbach School District, six miles north of Winkler.¹ In the following year more and more Bible School students offered two weeks of their vacation to teach under the supervision of Rev. Hunter. By 1933 the Winkler Bible School took over the organizational part of the southern Manitoba area under the leadership of Abram A. Kroeker.² In the beginning Canadian Sunday School Mission material was used, until their own could be developed. When the Kroekers gathered the young "missionaries" in their farm home for an inspiring and

prayerful send-off, the spiritual fervor and evangelistic zeal soared.

Rev. Hunter also started a Canadian Sunday School Mission Bible



Mr. A. A. Kroeker

Camp for children. Many Mennonite boys and girls attended free, if they had memorized 500 prescribed Bible verses. Others paid a nominal fee. Many of the children came home reporting they had had a conversion experience. Naturally parents rejoiced, but gradually some began to wonder about the methods used to persuade children to make a decision. They felt that too much pressure was exerted. It made parents aware of their spiritual obligation toward children, and of methods of evangelism more in keeping with their own tradition.

Rev. Hunter also held public meetings to arouse Christians to recognize their responsibility to bring the good news of Christ to the people around them. He would become very insis-

tent, asking those people who would promise to try to win at least one person for Christ every year to raise their hands.³

All these events awakened the slumbering consciousness of many Christians about obedience to the command of Jesus Christ to carry the gospel to all the world. They had, of course, known these demands, but had postponed action because of circumstances.

Now a few churches began having vacation Bible schools in their own areas. Others ventured out boldly to have the occasional service in a rented hall or school. Much singing was done in these services to attract the people. And it did that; the Mennonites began to be known as a singing people. These services were carried on by young people who spoke English fluently. The parents and older folk, busy earning a humble living and not having learned English well, prayerfully supported the young people in these efforts.

Although the young people evangelized enthusiastically, problems arose. Since all Mennonite Brethren services and Sunday schools (even in the older churches of Winkler, Grossweide, and Kronsart) were in German, the desire to attract people to their own worship services created difficulties. A peculiar paradox resulted: eagerness to evangelize, yet dread of the consequences. When someone was converted through the young people's evangelistic efforts, the questions were what to do with him or her, where they should worship, how they could be nurtured "to grow in grace." Young people urged the church to have a few English services. This suggestion was strongly resisted by the older members. It was not only the fear of an unknown language, but alarm at the upsetting effects of bringing a foreign culture into the church.

The problem was aggravated by impatient and unwise people. It took many years before the vexing questions of language and worship with non-Mennonites were settled, indeed, not before many of the older generation had departed "to be with the Lord" and a new generation came into leadership.⁴

The earliest venture of outreach into non-Mennonite areas was done in the Lindal School district south-west of Winkler. Poles, Germans, Czechs, Russians, and others lived there. David Forsyth of the Canadian Sunday School Mission first came to Lindal in 1934, teaching and preaching.⁵ Many were converted. Forsyth could stay only one month, but before leaving he contacted the Winkler MB Church and urged it to send someone to minister to the Christians there. Jacob A. Kroeker and Peter J. Esau were given this assignment. They served during the winter of 1934-35.⁶ Esau continued for a few months longer. Approximately thirty of the converted people were later baptized by Henry S. Voth (Winkler) and Johann P. Braun (Morden).⁷ The latter occasionally also ministered to the group in German and Russian. His English was very limited.

Braun's great contribution to the progress of this work was to inform the Manitoba Conference of the outreach at Lindal and urge the delegates to send a permanent worker there. At that time the Conference took no concrete steps, except for a promise to encourage ministers and singers to comply with the request to visit Lindal. Winkler and Morden were to look for a brother who could serve there. To expedite the work a collection was taken at the convention (\$28.75).⁸

Braun again reported at the fall convention. He also talked about a twelve-year-old boy who needed an artificial leg. A collection was immediately held to help defray the cost of the leg (\$29.57). Another collection was taken for the support of the work at Lindal (\$48.68).⁹ It seems as if the Conference wished to support these evangelistic efforts, yet moved cautiously so as not to commit itself to any definite decision. At the next convention it was decided to remunerate J.P. Braun with a collection in every church.¹⁰

The various nationalities of the converts created a peculiar problem. It was difficult to mould them into a united spiritual body. Nationalistic feelings persisted. In 1938 a Czech Baptist minister from Winnipeg came to Lindal once a month to serve them in their own language. This compelled the 1939 Conference to take a definite stand concerning Lindal. Aroused, the delegates seriously considered the question: shall we allow the work that has been done in Lindal since 1934 to be taken over by the Baptists? God had given them the work, they concluded; they must continue it. They decided



Johann P. Braun

to do all they could to restore unity in Lindal and establish an MB church. Since the school was no longer available, a building was a priority. A motion was unanimously passed to go ahead and build a chapel.

This 1939 decision to stand by the work in Lindal officially launched the Conference into a missionary operation.¹¹

The chapel was built during the same summer for \$665.47.¹² Through the patient work of ministers from Winkler and Morden greater cooperation was achieved among the Lindal believers. Not all difficulties were immediately removed and some tensions remained for years to come. The economic situation also aggravated the spiritual peace. A number of farmers had to give up farming in the area and move to what they hoped were greener pastures. It took another few years before a permanent worker was installed.

In 1941 the supervision of Lindal and any other missionary effort was given to a newly created committee the *Innere Missionskomitee*. Notwithstanding its name it was not an outreach committee but an all-embracing board to do most of the work the convention had previously done as a whole.¹³ Properly translated it was an "Internal Affairs Committee" for its duties were varied and many: to create an annual ministerial itinerary, to supervise the spiritual care of the conscientious objector camps, to foster Sunday school in all churches, to attend to the spiritual growth of churches, and to promote outreach.

Outreach beyond the Conference's limits was called *Randmission*. Its methods were: evangelization of children (DVBS), personal witnessing, home visitation, colportage, and evangelistic meetings where possible.¹⁴

Randmission became a separate standing committee in 1943. From that date on, the missionary efforts of the Manitoba Mennonite Brethren Church can be considered in two phases: the first from 1943 to 1969, and the second from 1969 to the present.

The Period of 1943 - 1969

Randmission

Now that the Conference had seriously undertaken outreach into one non-Mennonite area, the delegates began to search for other possibilities in the province. At the spring convention of 1944, Abram H. Redekopp was asked to travel throughout Manitoba to investigate possible missionary work in other places. He was advised to make inquiries first in areas where scattered Mennonite families lived. He visited the Mennonites in McAuley, Roblin, Swan River, Winnipegosis, Ste. Rose du Lac, McCreary, and Brookdale. These lonely Mennonites, at a distance from any Mennonite Brethren church, struggled, not only economically but also against the encroachment of alien cultures around them. Their children had only non-Mennonite friends and most of these were not Christians. Several places had potential outreach possibilities; the most likely one, according to Redekopp, was McAuley.¹⁵

At the fall convention of 1944, Abram A. Kroeker and Frank Friesen were sent north to continue the investigation. They visited Sheridan, Flin Flon, The

Pas, Winnipegosis. In their estimation Winnipegosis was the most likely spot to start a mission.

This sudden interest made people look for more possibilities. It was reported that there were ten more places in the south-east corner of Manitoba, close to the Minnesota border needing an evangelical witness. Investigation was called for Arnes, Arborg, and Riverton. Jacob P. Epp of Steinbach used a map of Manitoba to point out to the convention mission potentials, indicating that Woodridge and Middleboro were especially needy. The Ukrainians from Sarto had begged him to minister to them. Since he spoke Russian fluently, he was able to do that temporarily. That convention (October, 1944) decided that if workers could be found, it was willing to expand, because it realized "the fields are ripe; workers are few; much is still to be done."¹⁶

At the spring convention of 1945 enthusiasm for missionary outreach ran high and momentous decisions were made to step up evangelization among the Mennonites of the East and West reserves, and also to start new outreach ministries in Winnipegosis and Ashern. All delegates expressed great eagerness to proceed.

West Reserve

Already in 1936 and 1937 a gospel witness had been taken to the area south of Winkler by Jacob. J. Nikkel, a young, enthusiastic Christian. After his first year at the Winkler Bible School teachers and students, aware of his zeal for witnessing, asked him to spend his summer as a colporteur in the Mennonite villages and offered him \$15 a month. Someone lent him a bicycle. With books, Bibles and Friedrich Stark's prayer books (on credit from D.W. Friesen's of Altona) Nikkel set out with prayers and in the power of the Holy Spirit to visit every home. Often he would stop in quiet places, perhaps under a bridge, to pray for wisdom and strength.¹⁷

Many who knew Nikkel's life of worldly pleasures before his conversion, were deeply impressed with the young man's sincerity. Others again firmly closed their doors to his eagerness. He did this work for two summers.

Then the need to care for his family made him buy a farm in the Wingham area. A few years later when the Conference began to develop an enthusiastic missionary spirit, Nikkel appealed to the convention not to forget the great need in the Mennonite reserves. The *Randmission* committee asked him to continue to do the work he had done before. He moved his family to Osterwick and for two-and-a-half-years was a colporteur to the West Reserve (1944-46).¹⁸

At the next convention he reported that he had travelled 1,500 miles by horse and buggy, made 362 house calls, held eighteen services and started a youth endeavour (*Jugendverein*) in Osterwick. His wife began a sewing club there.¹⁹ With the coming of the tent mission a revival broke out in the West Reserve. Nikkel had sown the seed; now came the harvest.

For the sake of his children, he again moved back to his farm at Wingham. As much as his farm work permitted, he would still go out and visit people in the reserve.

East Reserve

Since 1927 Grunthal, in the East Reserve, had had a small group of MB members who worshipped together and were affiliated with the Steinbach Church. Through the years all the members had moved away except an elderly couple, the Abram Janzes. These pious people willingly offered their home for Bible study and services held by William Schroeder of Steinbach, who began these on his own initiative. A fair number of East Reserve Mennonites attended, and Schroeder was able to establish good rapport with them. The Conference began to support him with a small honorarium and asked him to visit that area twice a month and also to be the colporteur of Christian literature. Hopefully the proceeds of the sale of books would pay for his expenses.²⁰

Lindal

A full-time missionary worker, Jacob P. Kehler, was engaged for Lindal in 1943. He moved with his family onto a small farm purchased by the Conference. The house was repaired and enlarged for the Kehlrs and the land rented to a well-known supporter of the mission, Harry Guderian. Kehler, using the English language, was quite successful. Sunday school doubled, youth work begun; people became interested and conversions took place.

Ashern

A few families of the early Winnipeg MB Church had moved into this Interlake area. These had been frequently visited by the city missionaries, like Bestsvater, Hiebert, Henry S. Rempel. Later A.A. Kroeker, A.H. Redekopp



Ashern Mission at time of Joe Wiebes

and Jacob D. Friesen had also ministered to them. The Peter J. Esaus were the first to be engaged for the work there, moving in the summer of 1945.²¹ Esau, a man with musical talent, travelled by bicycle to visit farm after farm. On Sundays he would have services in any of the farm houses, up to three on a Sunday. His singing and music-making attracted many people. The next convention heard his report: he made 330 visits, talked to 27 sick people, held five Bible studies, 42 services, 28 Sunday schools, four choir classes, distributed 1,715 tracts, travelled 2,585 miles, 213 of them on foot. There had been four conversions. He also taught religion weekly in three schools.²²

A year later (1946) the Joe Wiebes were engaged for Ashern. The *Randmission* bought a 160 acre farm four miles out of Ashern.²³ The rural population included people of German, Dutch, Icelandic, Ukrainian, Indian, and Mennonite backgrounds. House visitation, Sunday school, religious instruction in public schools (3:30-4:00), and Bible study were Wiebe's methods of proclaiming God's Word.

Winnipegosis

Since the initial policy of the *Randmission* among non-Mennonites was to begin with the children, Margaret Dyck and Augusta Will were sent out to Winnipegosis in 1945. A.H. Redekopp accompanied them, arranged for their accommodation, encouraged them, and left. Winnipegosis in 1945 was a town of 900 people and many churches, not one of them evangelical. Population was cosmopolitan English, French, Icelandic, many Indians, and so on. In the area between Winnipegosis and Fork River also lived approximately thirty to forty Mennonite families of the General Conference who worshipped in their own country church, the Nordheim Mennonite Church.²⁴



Margaret Dyck, Anne Dueck

These two mission workers began with home visitations, telling people that they would like to start Sunday schools. Some families responded joyfully. Two Sunday schools were begun one in Winnipegosis, the other in South Bay, seven miles away. Augusta Will's place was soon taken over by Anna Dyck. The women also started club work and an adult Bible class. Margaret Dyck reported to the 1946 June convention: "A short time ago, after the evening service, a Catholic woman came to our house. Apparently what we had taught seemed incomprehensible to her. But this evening she was open and told us of her search for truth, and how much she wanted to be saved. Our joy was great to lead this soul to the feet of Jesus. With God's grace she will remain faithful and grow in the Lord."²⁵

These workers stayed only one year; Margaret Dyck became a missionary in Zaire. The Abram Esaus accepted the Winnipegosis responsibility on a temporary basis for one year, for they too, were preparing to go to Zaire.

Tent Mission

The idea of a "tent mission" was first proposed in 1946. For many this was a completely new thought, but brethren from Russia remembered well Jacob Dyck's tent mission to the non-Mennonites in southern Ukraine.

The first year Henry Brucks and Henry Poetker went out to evangelize



without a tent, holding their services in schools. In 1947 a tent (30 x 50 feet) was purchased and used during that summer by Brucks and Abram Goertz in Ashern, Winnipegosis, Fork River, and southern Manitoba. They registered thirteen conversions.²⁶

Year after year detailed reports were made by the mission workers to the Manitoba conventions. Usually the wives of the workers also reported at length of their experiences. Many a heart-warming story was related of people finding Christ or sad accounts of other rejecting Him. The delegates listened with great interest to these experiences: persons in hospitals responding to Christ in their last hours, some folk callously

Henry Brucks, Henry Poetker refusing to listen to the gospel, children gladly receiving Christ but facing ridicule in God-despising homes, a Christian father exposed to the steady acrimonious taunting of his wife and children, Christians who wished to be baptized but dared not, because of the threats of their family and relatives, faithful believers remaining staunch, shining lights in a dark and hostile world.

The June, 1947 convention stated that in the two years of home mission work the Lord had done great things. There were now four "stations" (Lindal, Grunthal, Winnipegosis, Ashern) and the tent mission. By and large all workers agreed that although the work was difficult, requiring faith, great devotion and much prayer, radical changes had occurred in the lives of many people. William Schroeder summarized the events with a Grunthal woman's comment, "Many things have changed in our area since you began to minister to us here."²⁷

To keep the missionary momentum going the workers were given three weeks "vacation" to visit the churches and report of their work. They could share a formidable list of activities on their stations: services for adults and children, Bible studies, prayer meetings, street meetings, house visitations, tract distribution, counselling. Also they could report of marvelous conver-

sions and implacable opposition.

Table 25 ²⁸

Example of one year's reports by the mission worker to the convention, June, 1950

	Ashern	Winnipegosis	Lindal	Total
Number of services	136	112	59	28
Attendance	4728	2597	1753	9078
Bible Studies	44	46	23	113
Attendance	367	174	290	831
Sunday School	51	188	17	256
Attendance	1453	3642	372	5467
Home visitations	243	122	51	416
Visits to sick people	28	29	3	60
Personal witnessing	270	211	41	522
Distribution of tracts	1016	2533	?	
Conversions: male	7	9	2	
female	4	8		30
Miles travelled	7382	7116	1101	

The Search for a Workable Mission Policy

The 1947 convention thought it wise, now that it had a few years' experience in home missions, to lay down a few principles for their missionary work. These were developed by the combined committees of the *Randmission*, City Mission and *Fürsorgekomitee* (Committee of Reference and Counsel) and were accepted by the delegates of the October, 1947 convention.

1. According to Scripture, all who have become Christians must be baptized and accepted as members in the church.

2. Such a group of believers is to be known as a Mennonite Brethren Mission of the Mennonite Brethren Conference under the leadership of the missionary.

3. The missionary is directed to examine the baptismal candidates, to instruct them concerning baptism, confession of faith of the Mennonite Brethren Church, church membership, the Lord's Supper, and to baptize them with the assistance of experienced brethren, and to administer the Lord's Supper.

4. The introduction to the Scriptures and the instruction of its principles form an essential element for the strengthening of the believer's faith, for a rationale of manners and conduct, and the cultivation of a God-fearing walk.

5. They are to be educated in the right understanding of biblical principles.

6. For Winnipeg the same methods apply according to the special circumstances of the city.

7. When a Mennonite Brethren mission is able to manage its own affairs and has a sufficient number of members, it is entitled to be considered an indigenous church of the Conference.²⁹

The Conference soon realized, to its consternation, that making rules (no

matter how biblical they were) for new believers who came out of a completely non-Christian background with an entirely different set of cultural standards, was easier than putting them into practice. The mission workers very quickly became aware that to have new believers baptized meant going against the standards these had been brought up with, relinquishing the love and goodwill of relatives, and producing overt opposition. This matter required patience and understanding.

The rule that believers were to be known as a Mennonite Brethren mission also created conflicts. The Conference's outreach goal was to bring men and women to a decision to follow Christ, baptize them and then organize them into a Mennonite Brethren church. This procedure was pursued in foreign missions and it was taken for granted it would also be done at home. The insistence on establishing MB churches caused the mission workers much grief, puzzled the converts, and contributed to the abandonment of the early stations. The new believers did not understand the term "Mennonite," believing it to have ethnic connotations. It required patient and extended explanations, and still many objected.³⁰

Colportage

In 1952 the Conference decided to engage a man for year-round colportage. His travelling expenses were to be covered by the sale of books. It was not until 1955 that Peter W. Martens was engaged to do this work and also visit the outlying settlements of Mennonite Brethren members.³¹

Daily Vacation Bible School

For many years (1933-58) the Winkler Bible School had been in charge of the Vacation Bible schools held all over Manitoba during the summer months.³² Many students during that time had unlimited opportunities to practice what they learned in school, and the Missions Committee gleaned valuable information of spiritually needy areas in Manitoba. In 1960 the new "field man," J.J. Neufeld, began to direct the work. When his other assignments prevented him from continuing that supervision, Martha Stobbe, John Froese, Marvin Quiring and Edwin Kroeger in turn carried on the work till 1969. In 1966 the Home Missions Committee developed detailed "Principles and Guidelines for Daily Vacation Bible Schools."³³ These principles reiterated the three phase method, with modifications, that had been used throughout the preceding years: research an area as to the need of an evangelical witness, send in DVBS team for a week or two, in case of a fair response a full-time worker may be sent in to begin a mission. In 1969 the new executive secretary introduced a different concept of ministering to children.

Field man

After many years of deliberations concerning a field man for home missions, this became a reality in 1960. John J. Neufeld from Grossweide was

asked to undertake that task. He was to supervise vacation Bible schools, visit all the mission stations and help them with their problems, visit churches and encourage them to support missions, look for open doors for new stations, conduct evangelistic campaigns, and help in the work of the city mission. In addition to that full agenda the Missions committee asked him to start a Low German radio program.³⁴ With such a work load, it was inevitable that real concentration would be possible in a few areas only. Within a few years Neufeld's work was mainly the Low German radio program and evangelism, and the supervising and directing of mission stations was again in abeyance. Nevertheless, in 1962 he travelled 30,000 miles, supervised Vacation Bible schools of 2,846 children, and distributed 12,000 copies of his radio messages.³⁵

Ashern, the First Mission Casualty

The Joe Wiebes became well-known in the Ashern area. People soon came to trust him or to hate him for he was very direct and insistent in bringing the gospel to them. He literally fulfilled the injunction to Timothy (2 Tim. 4:2).

A little church was bought and moved onto the Wiebe farm, and a brightly painted sign proclaimed "Marne Chapel, Canada Inland Mission." The winter "fish road" inconveniently led across Wiebe's yard, so Wiebe painted a large sign "Prepare to meet thy God" and planted it in the snow beside the trail.³⁶

He also expanded his work to Moosehorn, Clarkleigh, and St. Laurent.

Wiebe, in constant communication with his heavenly Father, reported "it is wonderful the way the Lord leads. Last fall the Lord put it upon my heart that I should travel farther south to St. Laurent. At the first meeting there four souls were saved. From that time on we also went regularly there and more souls were saved."³⁷

Marie Wiebe reported to the Conference: "The Lord has done wonders in Clarkleigh. A few boys who before played at dances have been converted. One day the people again wanted them to play, but they refused. A woman angrily exclaimed 'As long as that Wiebe was not in the district, everything went smoothly, but he spoiled it all'."³⁸ Marie Wiebe organized a women's club, known as "Christian Fellowship Aid Meetings." Here the participants sewed necessary articles for the local hospital. This assistance was highly appreciated by the town council and by the hospital. Mrs. Wiebe was able to exert a positive, Christian influence upon the women.³⁹

The mission workers here encountered the same difficulties as at other places — economic depression, dwindling membership, and a complete lack of understanding of church affiliation, particularly the Mennonite Brethren church.

The little church building on the farm was moved to the town of Ashern in 1955.

After ten years of intensive and fairly successful work Wiebe became ill and had to resign his position. Ben Doerksen took over the work with the understanding that he would leave after two years. No successor was found.⁴⁰

The Conference, somewhat disillusioned because no Mennonite Brethren

Church had been organized in twelve years, decided in 1958 to discontinue their support of Ashern. The people were informed of that decision.

A fair number of believers were left without a shepherd. Some went to Moosehorn to join the Baptist church, a few moved away, and a few remained to fellowship in small groups. The chapel was quickly sold to a Jehovah Witness group, although one of the believers offered to buy it. Today that group of believers has grown into a flourishing independent church, not affiliated with any conference; its pastor is a man by the name of Abe Froese.⁴¹

A Period of Transition

The period after the loss of Ashern was characterized by an intense search for the right approach to missions in Manitoba. The difficulties throughout the years in Lindal and the steady loss of members in Winnipegosis raised serious questions about where and how mission should be conducted.

The growing financial requirements for mission projects salaries, housing, church buildings, and maintenance became somewhat burdensome for the delegates. After all the years of missionary efforts not one of the three stations was indigenous, nor did they want to organize as Mennonite Brethren churches. It was frustrating and depressing. Were the workers not doing their duty? the delegates wondered. Was the mission committee too lenient?

To offer direction the Conference devised, in 1958, a five year plan for mission stations to become self-supporting. It stated:⁴²

(a) in five years every mission station should be prepared to organize into a church and to become self-supporting.

(b) The first year of its existence the Conference will pay the complete salary of the worker.

(c) The second year the mission group pays one fifth of the salary, and with every following year commits itself to add a further fifth until it reaches self-support.

This was contrary to all reasonable expectations. It was apparently impossible for the delegates to project themselves into the culture and thinking of non-Mennonites.

A new trend in mission thinking had been felt for a number of years. The older ministers who had been at one time the great impetus for mission had died, and a new generation of leaders had other ideas as to methods.

There was not only a cultural gap between the established MB churches and the mission stations, but also often condescending and patronizing attitudes toward the groups of new converts. To correct this situation and to facilitate the progress from mission station to a Mennonite Brethren church a middle step was created the mission church.⁴³ The 1961 convention accepted the recommendation of the Missions committee that a station was to organize into a mission church with the baptized believers, and that the worker be called "pastor." The church would be listed in the Manitoba Conference yearbook. The mission church would now accept more responsibility for its operation, electing a council, deacons, and committees (Education,

Youth, Trustees).

This did not mean that the mission church was entirely independent; the Missions Committee would still counsel and supervise. Neither would the mission church be indigenous; it would still be supported by the Conference, but it was to learn the responsibilities of a church, and, if possible, to learn to support missions and Conference.

These principles were repeated in the 1964 Mission Policies, and a number of detailed regulations added (see Appendix).⁴⁴ The goal of these policies was to "evangelize in a given community by preaching and visitations in order to establish an organized church of Jesus Christ."

This goal had existed since the Conference began missionary work. It was exceedingly disappointing to the delegates that in spite of all their efforts it had not been reached.

Lindal - a happy termination

In 1946 a reunion of the people baptized in Lindal who had moved to other places was celebrated "to praise the wonderful works of God wrought in our lives, based on Acts 2:11."⁴⁵ Two former members are now missionaries: Della Shareski with the Bible Christian Union in Germany, and Dr. Ronald Guderian with the World Missionary Fellowship in Ecuador. He is at the present leading two medical research teams: one studying onchocerciasis (river blindness), and the other leishmaniasis (a tropical disease prevalent in Ecuador's eastern jungle).⁴⁶

Abram Goertz was engaged as mission worker (1948-52) and asked to win the youth of the area. With his artistic abilities he inspired the young people to produce a chorus book and beautiful posters advertising meetings. Church members were thankful and responded by buying an electric washing machine for the missionary's home.

Wilmer Kornelsen (1952-55) succeeded Goertz. He persuaded the believers that adherence to a church would help them in loyalty and discipline. Apparently the people felt no obligation toward the mission, coming and going as they pleased. All who attended, baptized or not, could vote on decisions concerning the mission. With the cooperation of the *Randmission* and the Committee of Reference and Counsel Kornelsen organized Lindal into a church under Canada Inland Mission. It was not an MB church.

Peter Penner was very effective (1955-57) with young people. Several were converted. The first winter he could not hold services because of impassable roads, but Bible studies were held in Guderian's home. Services were well attended during Penner's second year.

After Penner the Lindal group wanted to continue on their own without a mission worker. That proved a frustrating experiment, and after a year the group approached the *Randmission* about inviting the Morden Christian Missionary Alliance pastor to minister to them.⁴⁷ This request, quite naturally, perturbed the Committee and they asked Joe Wiebe, who had recovered from his illness, to take over the Lindal work.

The Wiebes moved to Morden and immediately won the support of the Lin-

dal group by becoming members of their church. With tears in his eyes Joe Shiskosky officially received them into their midst. New members joined the Lindal church, which spent \$1,400 for an addition to their church building. Wiebe reported: "A minister came into our home for counselling. He found assurance of salvation. A young man found peace with God while working in his garden. A boy of twelve accepted the Lord at a wiener roast. A young man found the Redeemer in the hospital."

As the other mission workers had done, Wiebe also extended his influence to Snowflake. There was one Mennonite Brethren family, the others were Presbyterians, Rudnerweider, Sommerfelder, Bergthaler.

There were also those who designedly avoided Wiebe, just as in Ashern. With a mischievous smile and a twinkle in his eye Wiebe related the following incident when interviewed: "I was hopelessly stuck on a lonely, muddy road. I walked to the next farm and asked for help. The farmer and his two sons were having their evening meal. I recognized them as men who were very strongly opposed to my spiritual work. They laughed at me and harshly refused to help. Quietly I asked: Could your possibly put me up for the night? Immediately one of the young men jumped up, started a tractor and pulled my car out."⁴⁸

After six successful years at Lindal, years in which everyone in the area had learned to know and love Wiebe or to fear him, he resigned. An intensive evaluation was then undertaken by the Missions Committee, the members of Lindal and Snowflake, and the ministers of Morden, Manitou and Crystal City. Together with Joe Wiebe it was decided to dissolve the mission church. The rationale was as follows:

Several families had already moved to Morden, and wanted to join a larger church because of their teenagers.

Only three families remained. They also desired to join an evangelical church in Morden.

The roads were vastly improved and all families owned cars.

No member would really remain without spiritual nourishment.

Daily Vacation Bible school could be carried on by the Morden MB Church.

Snowflake could organize its own DVBS with the assistance of the Missions Committee. Services could be planned with ministers from Manitou and Crystal City.⁴⁹

A farewell service was held June 19, 1966. It was a glorious thanksgiving for thirty years of God's presence in that area. The group was one in the Lord; they had learned to understand and love one another. A few tears were shed. It was a victorious conclusion.

Winnipegosis - a Pragmatic Conclusion

Two years after the work in Winnipegosis was begun the John Froeses arrived. A house was bought for them and they stayed in the work for four years. By teaching religion once a week in several public schools (between 3:30-4:00, as the Manitoba School Act permitted), Froese was able to reach



Winnipegosis Congregation

eighty children. This work was gradually expanded to eight schools. Street meetings were begun. There were conversions and baptisms.⁵⁰ Two years later a small church building was purchased and attendance increased. Twice the congregation had baptisms of five persons each.

In 1951 Peter W. Martens succeeded J. Froese; he continued in the same active way for four years. The relative isolation of Winnipegosis and difficulties of transportation prevented this mission from feeling part of a larger brotherhood. This was one reason why it was not willing to become an MB church. Martens urged ministers and singing groups to travel north to fellowship with the people there. A few did.

P. Martens reported: "Every Saturday we preach the Gospel on Main Street. Along the streets, alone or in groups, in their cars, in the businesses, people hear the Gospel. They stand behind open doors and windows and hear the Good News. Many of these never go to church. I am thinking of a woman, who every time stands behind the screen door on the second floor and reverently listens from the beginning to the end. We told ourselves 'And if only this woman would find the Lord through our street meetings, we would be amply rewarded'."⁵¹

The Harry Loewens served after Martens, 1955-57. Loewen was especially successful with children, and a fair number of conversions occurred. Seven believers were baptized.⁵²

The Frank Peters stayed for three years, 1957-60. Every worker tried to be innovative. Peters held youth rallies in the Campbellton ball park. Up to 150 young people attended. Frank Peters later became a missionary in Brazil.

After Peters the ministry in Winnipegosis was somewhat unsettled for a few years. A permanent minister could not be found. Temporary workers were: Jake Buhler, Alfred Friesen, Henry Willms, John Froese. John Block

remained for two years. Discouraging factors in the Winnipegosis work were the poor crops and the subsequent economic depression. Many fine church members were forced to move to the city or to find better farming conditions.

By 1967, there was only one member left. In the eyes of the Conference the situation seemed desperate. But John Block stated, "The decline in membership is not an indication of closed doors in the community."⁵³ Joe Wiebe was persuaded to go to Winnipegosis and take over an apparently hopeless task. But Wiebe had been engaged by Mennonite Brethren Missions and Services to minister to the Mennonites in Mexico for three months. During that period Ed Hamm worked in Winnipegosis. Wiebe could not change the depressing economic breakdown in the community, however. Soon there were no members left. But the Wiebes discovered that the ministry of the various workers over the past twenty-five years had made a definite impact upon the community. The labours of the past had not been in vain.⁵⁴

Arrangements were made with the Nordheim Mennonite Church, which had moved into town, to continue the mission work in Winnipegosis. There were a number of Mennonite families who had always been very supportive of the mission, assisting in Sunday school, Bible study and street meetings. The transfer service was held on June 15, 1969.

Tent Mission Delights

For five or six weeks every summer from 1946 to 1955 evangelists preached in tent meetings in Winnipegosis, Ashern, the East and West Reserves, and as opportunity was given, in Sifton, Camperville, Arden, Sperling, Lowe Farm, Morris, Woolrich, Wingham, Elm Creek, Newton Siding, Clarkleigh, Darlingford, Gravel Ridge, McCreary, and Fork River. After Henry Brucks, Henry Poetker, and Abram Goertz the following men ministered: Wendel Mann, John Regehr, Jake Friesen, Helmut Janzen and Jacob D. Friesen, who served seven summers.

The brethren used the MB Bible College truck and collapsible benches. They always found willing local men to help put up the tent and take it down later. The tent could seat several hundred people. They would stay a week in one place, have services in the evenings, and visit people during the day.⁵⁵

J.D. Friesen recounted some of his many experiences in an interview. One day in the Wingham area they found a stalled car on the road and offered their help. The man wanted to be pushed to the garage. They did, but this was miles away and they were worried about their gasoline supply. They had had only enough to get them back to Winnipeg, and this extra trip made it doubtful. When they arrived at the garage the man asked what he owed them. Replied Friesen, "Your payment will be your attendance at the evening meeting." "That we will do," was the answer by the man who was known all over the district as one who unequivocally opposed evangelistic efforts. That same day the evangelists had afternoon coffee with a Mennonite Brethren family. During the meal the father told his son to fill up the evangelist's car with gasoline. The Lord provided for their return trip. That evening the man whom they had helped attended the meeting with his whole family. His daughter

was converted and later joined the Elm Creek MB Church.

In Winnipegosis, an old man approached Friesen as he stood at the door of the mission church welcoming the people for the service. Friesen began to talk to him and asked him whether he was a Christian. The old man brusquely replied, "Son, I listened not only to the likes of you; I heard Billy Sunday." Friesen's quiet response was, "It is not only a matter of hearing good preaching, the Word of God must be accepted." After a moment of intense silence, the older man said, "Son, when I am ready, I'll call you."

Nothing happened at that time, but a year later when the tent mission was again in that area the old man came to Friesen. "I have been waiting for you," he said. "I'm ready now." Humbly he accepted the salvation of Jesus Christ. At a service in the afternoon he gave a powerful and touching testimony. A few weeks later he answered the call of God to his eternal rest.

While the joys and the difficulties of these mission efforts created most of the interest and the problems for the Conference, other mission opportunities availed themselves. A growing trend in the thinking of the Conference was that successful mission work would best be done with a nucleus of Mennonite Brethren members to establish a stable and growing church. These opportunities did not create as much enthusiasm as the early mission stations had done, but all, except one, proved to be successful.

Horndean

The Canadian Sunday School Mission conducted vacation Bible schools in Horndean in the early 1920s. J.J. Nikkel worked for a short time in this area. When a school was moved to the Horndean railway station in 1932 regular worship services were held there on a non-denominational basis. Grossweide MB Church, the newly-organized Rudnerweide Church, and the Winkler



Abe Quiring Family

Bible School took turns serving this group.⁵⁶

Many of the Old Colony Mennonites who had emigrated to Mexico in the early 1920s were returning. Almost all were economically and spiritually destitute, for the Old Colony Mennonites of Manitoba refused to accept them. The Tent Mission, often having contact with these returnees, reported to the Conference about them and added, "The first mission field of our Conference should be our brethren according to the flesh."

In 1952 the Altona MB Church building was moved to Horndean. A year later Abram Quiring became the mission worker, and remained until 1959 when he exchanged positions with Peter W. Martens.

Because of the declining membership in Grossweide, Horndean was merged with the older church in 1964.

Carman

Scattered between Roland and Roseisle were a number of believers, mostly of Sommerfelder and Old Colony background, as well as a few non-Mennonites. They had been served sporadically by Henry H. Redekopp from Winkler, Peter Penner from Lindal, and Henry H. Klassen from Morden. Bible study and prayer meetings were held in Abe Wiebe's home in Graysville. In 1956 the group rented a room next to the York Cafe in Carman and began with worship services. The first service was conducted by H.H. Redekopp with the Winkler Bible School choir singing. The group organized without a minister, hoping the brethren from Winkler and Morden would serve them. The same year they bought land for a church and immediately started to build. In the meantime they appealed to the Mennonite Brethren Conference for a minister.



Mr. and Mrs. Peter W. Martens

In 1957 the Conference responded by sending Peter W. Martens to them. Martens lived in Steinbach and came to Carman for weekends and stayed until Wednesday. The chapel was finished in 1958. Martens was succeeded in 1959 by Abram Quiring, who served until 1963. Quiring also expanded the work to Roland, and to Eldorado School south of Roseisle and Sterling, where mostly Old Colony Mennonites lived. The hunger for God's Word and the eagerness with which they studied it, made the Eldorado experience one of the highlights of the work.

Until that time the church was known as the Carman Gospel Light Mission, without a denominational label. When in 1962 it organized as a Mennonite Brethren Church most of the believers

quite willingly joined. A few did so reluctantly and a number refused and left. Work after the organization was a little more difficult, for Carman is a conservative town and hard to change.

Brooklands Community Church

In the early 1920s a number of Mennonite immigrants from Russia settled in the Brooklands area, at that time the outskirts of Winnipeg. Rev. Abram Peters from the North End Chapel went there every second Sunday to serve the settlers. After his death services were discontinued. Gradually the Mennonites moved out, closer to church or work. In the 1950s South End Church branched out into Brooklands with a mission Sunday school. In 1957 the Home Missions Committee took over the work, but the South End members continued to serve. Among these workers were Bert Huebner, Jake Klippenstein, Nick Dick and Jake Froese.

In 1963 the Home Missions Committee appointed Abe and Anne Quiring as mission workers. That same year they began with worship services in the Butterworth School. Non-Mennonites attended. A year later the first baptism of two candidates took place. Others were won for Christ who today are very active in the church. Friendship evangelism is their most successful method.

The Brooklands MB Church became indigenous in 1971.

Westview MB Church - Portage la Prairie

By urging a number of Newton MB members who lived in or close to Portage la Prairie a mission was opened in 1959 with John Quiring as worker. The object of this mission was, of course, not only to gather the Mennonites but also to carry the gospel to all who would listen. In this city it was necessary to identify the work clearly as a church and not merely as a mission. The group of believers organized as a Mennonite Brethren Church in 1962 with twenty-two members.⁵⁷ A year later an architecturally attractive chapel was finished on Saskatchewan Avenue. Attendance increased. In 1964 Quiring concluded his report to the convention with, "Another encouraging aspect of our work is the young people. It is a very encouraging group, and they gladly participate in the devotional part of the program."⁵⁸

After six years of pioneer work Quiring left for the prison chaplaincy at Headingly. John Epp stayed for two years and was followed by Ed Giesbrecht in 1968. Giesbrecht remained until 1971 and the church decided to continue without a pastor.

Gradually difficulties arose. Some of the members attended intermittently, others were moving away, active and supportive Christians of the Mennonite General Conference did not become members, evangelism was neglected.

In 1971 the supervision of the mission churches was delegated to the Conference executive. The Committee of Reference and Counsel could not find agreement with the policy of the Westview church. Its argument was that the Mennonite Brethren Conference had established the Westview Church and was still supporting the church, that evangelism was neglected. It was averse to having the church move in the direction of an inter-Mennonite arrange-

ment.

After a few intensive meetings with the membership, the Committee of Reference and Counsel proposed that the group purchase the building and become an independent church, or that the conference remain owner of the building and rent the facilities to Westview, but that the church be dissolved as a Mennonite Brethren church. The Portage la Prairie church was given one year to make a decision.

The church as a whole still desired contact with the Conference and the MB members refused to become part of an independent church. In 1974 the membership decided to dissolve the fellowship. A few years later the building was sold to a day care group.

Executive Secretary

At the 1968 convention the Missions Committee again proposed to engage the services of a field man, now called an executive secretary. The need of such a position was obvious. The Missions Committee met only three or four times a year. The mission workers' problems would have to wait until the next meeting, a few months later. Also, the committee members were unable to properly research the difficulties of the mission. For these reasons, it was claimed, the urgency of missions was diminished and there was little growth to be seen. The DVBS director changed almost every year. A permanent executive could do the work better. The Committee also thought of the urgency of hospital chaplaincy and a half-way house.⁵⁹ The Conference was given the job description of an executive director and a recommendation to seek a brother to take over the task in 1969. This recommendation was accepted.

NOTES Chapter 10

1. *Interview*. Nettie Kroeker, Jan. 19, 1982.
2. The Bible School took over the work of DVBS from 1933-1958.
3. The author, at that time a teacher in rural Manitoba, often had to test such camp contestants as to how well they knew their Bible verses, and report results to the CSSM. He also heard the concern of the parents about methods used at the CSSM camp to urge children to make a decision to follow Christ. He personally attended one of Hunter's meetings in Winkler in which Hunter asked people to promise to win at least one soul a year for Christ.
4. Again the author, then a young man, often was a listener to the endless acrimonious debate of German vs. English, that created so much pain and unspiritual behavior.
5. Guderian, Harry. *Letter to the author*. January 10, 1983.
6. Guderian, Harry. *Letter to the author*. January 10, 1983.
7. *Minutes of the Manitoba Conference*. 1936.
8. *Manitoba Minutes*. Spring, 1936.
9. *Manitoba Minutes*. Fall, 1936.
- 10 *Manitoba Minutes*. Spring, 1937.
11. The 1939 minutes do not actually state that the Conference was now

embarking on a new venture, but from that point on the Conference took responsibility for missions beyond their own church pale.

12. *Manitoba Minutes*. Fall, 1939.
13. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1941, p. 4.
14. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1943.
15. *Manitoba Minutes*. Spring, 1944, p. 12.
16. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1944, p. 13.
17. *Notes* about the work of J. J. Nikkel written by his wife, Mrs. Margaret Nikkel.
18. *Notes* by Mrs. Margaret Nikkel.
19. *Manitoba Minutes*. Spring, 1945, p. 14.
20. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1945, p. 8.
21. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1945, p. 6.
22. *Manitoba Minutes*. Spring, 1946, pp. 7-20.
23. *Interview*. Joe Wiebe, Nov. 23, 1981.
24. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1947, p. 16.
25. *Manitoba Minutes*. Spring, 1946, p. 30.
26. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1948, p. 9.
27. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1946, p. 13.
28. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1950, p. 22.
29. *Manitoba Minutes*. Fall, 1947, p. 9.
30. *Manitoba Minutes*. Fall, 1947, p. 22. General arguments opposing the formation of M.B. churches from a letter written by Harry Guderian, Nov. 30, 1982: "Why should Lindal become an M.B. church, when there are no Mennonites. It would have been more reasonable to call it a Polish Brethren church or an English Brethren church. . . . Lindal had no argument with the Mennonite Christians, but refused to carry their banner. To them it was nothing less than racial discrimination to do so. . . . I know you can counter all this by saying that 'Mennonite' is nothing more than a denomination. . . . However, here in southern Manitoba it is much more. Take the Mennonite language, Mennonite food, Mennonite cook book, Mennonite Museum, etc."
31. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1955, p. 5.
32. Pries, G. D. *A Place Called Peniel*. (Altona, MB: D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1975) p. 169.
33. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1966, pp. 35-36.
34. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1960, p. 23.
35. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1962, p. 29.
36. *Interview*. Joe Wiebe. Also *Manitoba Minutes*, 1949.
37. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1957, pp. 30-39.
38. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1957, pp. 30-39.
39. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1953, p. 27.
40. *Interview*. Joe Wiebe.
41. *Interview*. Joe Wiebe.
42. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1958, p. 21.
43. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1961, p. 50.
44. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1964, pp. 58-61.

45. *Konferenz-Jugendblatt*, Oct. 1946, p. 9.
46. HCJB pamphlet. 1985.
47. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1959, p. 3.
48. Interview. Joe Wiebe.
49. *Manitoba Minute*. 1966, p. 28.
50. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1948, pp. 27-30.
51. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1951.
52. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1957, p. 37.
53. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1965, p. 36.
54. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1968, p. 86.
55. Interview with J.D. Friesen, Jan. 19, 1982.
56. Author Unknown. *A Brief History of the Horndean M.B. Church..*
June 18, 1980.
57. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1962, p. 2.
58. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1964, p. 55.
59. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1968, p. 90.

Chapter 11

MISSION AND CHURCH EXTENSION - Part I

A. 1969 to the Present

Determining The Mission's Direction

The previous period had concluded on a somewhat somber note. Missionary efforts begun so enthusiastically twenty-five years ago seemed now to be at a low ebb. Three mission churches had been discontinued through the years. There were still four other mission churches, trying hard to reach the communities around them, but of these the greater part of the membership was of Mennonite Brethren background. The apparent inability to reach non-Mennonites with the gospel and make church members of the converts gave the Conference a feeling of failure, and resulted in a general decline of mission interest.

Valiant efforts were made by a number of delegates of the 1968 convention to pinpoint the reasons for indifference. Said one, "We have lost our first love for the Lord and his work"; another offered, "We need more reports of the mission work in the *Rundschau* and the *Herald* (MB periodicals)"; one added, "Perhaps it is time to redirect our resources into areas of greater opportunities." Also, one must consider the fact, a new generation had replaced the old. The "old guard" with its fervent missionary zeal, but little understanding of the thinking of non-Mennonites, had passed away; the new generation was influenced by the societal culture to a much greater degree. In a period of economic opportunities, many were preoccupied with personal advancement.

The 1968 convention took definite steps to revive interest in missions at home. The Home Missions Committee was to prepare a quarterly newsletter and send it to the churches for free distribution to all members. After years of discussing the pros and cons of creating the position of field director, they finally decided to engage the services of someone who would devote his time to the expansion of missions. He was to begin his work in the fall of 1969.¹

The Home Missions Committee found in James Nikkel a man with vision, knowledge, energy, and enthusiasm to direct the work. He was given suffi-

cient time to study missions situation of Manitoba and to propose plans for the future. Together with the committee and its chairman, Victor Adrian, Nikkel tried to formulate the aims, methods, and principles of home missions. Adrian, a man with a heart for outreach, had been the author of the 1964 mission policies.

The Committee's first objective was to win the support of the general MB membership of Manitoba, not only the delegates, for its task. Unfortunate, and deep-rooted, was the idea that the "church" was the group of believers at home and "missions" the people beyond the secluded pale of the Mennonite Brethren Conference, that is, the non-Mennonites, wherever they lived. The truth that all believers are equal before God, irrespective of colour, race, nationality, language or financial standing, had to penetrate the thinking of the home church. The church, the Body of Christ, was to be an agency for good, a messenger speaking redemptively in a world plagued by problems and evil.

By word of mouth and by writing, the Manitoba MB churches were encouraged to activate their faith in the world. Every church was to be a missionary church and every Christian a witness to the saving power of Christ.

In the meantime the Conference had also appointed a commission to study the "effectiveness and usefulness in the light of the expenses involved" of the four major areas of conference work: MBCI, WBI, Radio, Home Missions.² The commission for Home Missions consisted of P.J. Doerksen, A.A. Unruh, J.D. Friesen.

According to their judgment the proclamation of the gospel was a priority, because of Christ's command (Mt. 28: 19, 20), His extension program (Acts 1:8), His statement of true value (Mk. 8:36), the example of Paul (I Cor. 9:16), and the practice of the early church (I Thess. 1:8).³ They added, "Education, be it at Winkler Bible Institute or Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute or at any other institute, can only be justified as a church program on the premise that it will aid in preparing individuals to witness and carry out Christ's command to evangelize."⁴

One of their recommendations, strongly emphasized, was that the remaining mission churches (whose membership consisted mainly of Mennonites) be considered full-fledged churches even though they would need financial aid. That should be the responsibility of the Conference, not of the Home Missions Committee.⁵

The new field director and the committee inspired each other to do evangelism aggressively, enthusiastically. The committee itself was divided into three commissions: the inner city, the suburban, and the rural area, in order to better plan and implement new projects.

Chaplaincy and Hospital Work

To relieve the Home Missions Committee of its responsibility toward the mission churches (Salem, Brooklands, Carman, Portage la Prairie, now considered full-fledged churches) the 1971 convention decided that the Board of Trustees would look after the financial needs of these churches and the Com-

mittee of Reference and Counsel (CRC) after the spiritual.⁶ The only work left to the Home Missions Committee was the chaplaincy and hospital visitation. (Note: Because the CRC was not familiar with the problems of the former mission churches, this decision was revoked by the 1976 convention, and the responsibility returned to the Board of Missions until these churches would become completely indigenous.)

The two areas now still under the Home Missions Committee's jurisdiction were well taken care of: prison chaplaincy by John Quiring and the hospital visitations by Joe Wiebe. Since Joe Wiebe had recovered from his heart attack, he was asked to attempt hospital visitation half-time. But Wiebe could never do his assignments part-time. He became very deeply involved in it. At



Joe and Marie Wiebes' Visitation

the 1971 convention he reported, "The Lord opened opportunities in twelve different hospitals, the blind institute, senior citizens homes, and in many private homes." Wiebe was a very effective counsellor and doctors, nurses, and concerned relatives referred him to the sick. People from his former mission communities would contact him, if they happened to be sick in city hospitals. He visited a polio patient in the King George Hospital weekly for many years.⁷ Wiebe reported, "Some people have been saved. Some are old, feeble, crippled. With some of the unfortunates, I have weekly visits for further instruction and encouragement from the Bible. I call them the 'scattered church'. The Word of God is a real comfort and encouragement for many."⁸

He also conducted a weekly Bible study in Lions Manor. Even the privacy of his home was sometimes invaded by those who needed spiritual counselling; Wiebe was always ready to offer help no matter how tired he was. "There are a lot of trials, tears, tests, fears in the life of the patients, and their loved ones, and often it means a preparation for death."⁹ "We find broken hearts, depressed and captive under the power of the evil one. We thank the

Lord who can solve every problem."¹⁰ Wiebe had wonderful support from his wife. They kept on singing "We will work till Jesus comes" as they had done since the early days of the ministry. They retired in 1979, but as long as God gives them health, they will continue to point people to Jesus Christ.¹¹

The same year, 1979, the following recommendation was accepted by the Conference: "That the half-time chaplaincy be deleted and that it be combined with the Christian Resource Center work."¹²

John Quiring, in the meantime, had been appointed by the Director of Manitoba Corrections to serve as acting provincial Protestant chaplain until a replacement would be found. This added much to Quiring's responsibility, but it confirmed the respect he had with the officials of the Corrections department. On a monthly basis Quiring also visited the Birds Hill and Bannock Point Rehabilitation Camps. Marital counselling was often necessary. Quiring revealed a sensitive and understanding spirit in dealing with these derelicts of life. In 1979 he was transferred to the Christian Resource Center. George Klassen became the chaplain for a few years, then Gerald Hildebrand, and after him Walter Wiens.

New Horizons - The North

After the chaplaincy services for hospital and prisons had been assigned, the Missions Committee was free to explore new areas of work. Following a period of intense research and many prayers, the Committee decided to make the North its field of activity. A two-pronged thrust was to be carried out: Christian day camps and Bible study groups promoted by friendship evangelism.

The Christian Day Camp program was a new venture, combining the goals of daily vacation Bible school and the camp adventure. It simply brought the camp to the children instead of the children to the camp. A Christian Day Camp program ran from Monday to Friday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The daily agenda was skillfully developed to include a morning Bible study lesson, camping skills sessions, creative expression periods, and large group sing-songs, stories, object lessons and various wilderness encounters. Campers were named and divided by age as follows: The trail campers, age 7-8; wilderness campers, age 9-10; the survival campers, age 11-12. The camp leaders were responsible for their assigned group for the entire week's program. Campers went home for meals and nights, giving them the opportunity to transfer their experiences into their home settings on a daily basis.¹³ The objective of the program was to foster wholesome personal development: spiritual, physical, social and mental.

This program replaced DVBS as it had been carried on by the Home Missions Committee for many years. The individual MB churches throughout Manitoba were still urged, however, to conduct vacation Bible schools in their communities.

Christian Day Camps were also designed to introduce the camp staff to the homes. Places where these contacts were successful could be followed up with Bible study and hopefully with worship services.

The Committee tried to involve volunteers from the southern MB churches. It was anticipated that the rapidly developing northern area would at-



Christian Day Camp Activities

tract a number of church people from Southern Manitoba, who would then be willing to align themselves with the Home Missions work in some specific Christian venture. Such volunteers would be known as "Lay Mission Associates," men and women "who accepted the call of God to become deliberately involved in the ministry of witness and proclamation of the Good News of the Gospel in their social, geographical or vocational community."¹⁴

The target area in the North was to be: The Pas, Flin Flon, Cranberry Portage, Snow Lake, Thompson. James Nikkel, the executive secretary, would personally direct the northern thrust by locating in The Pas. The committee sent out a general call to the MB membership of Manitoba: "We are not interested in erecting buildings, but in calling men and women to Christ and into His service. We invite you to consider your responsibility before the Lord. Why don't you join the James Nikkels in penetrating the North for Christ."¹⁵

During the summer of 1970 the Christian Day Camps were operating in the North as well as in the Portage la Prairie area. A few years later Ken Neufeld, at that time the Christian Day Camp director, reported: "Many campers are accepting Jesus Christ and are followed up through the winter. As staff members visit the campers' parents, they are warmly received and frequently discussions turn to God's offer of salvation. . . . Christian Day Camps are serving as a bridge into new communities."¹⁶

The Pas

The Nikkels moved to The Pas in the fall of 1970. The first "Lay Mission

Associates" were the Ron Kroekers. Their initial efforts focussed on establishing themselves as recognized and responsible citizens in the community, taking part in local activities, always being prepared to offer a Christian witness.

Next Nikkel was able to organize several Bible study groups which he named "Neighborhood Life Groups." These groups had several objectives:

They were to be charitable organizations promoting "Christian services, pastoral care and counsel according to the needs and resources of the neighbourhood."

They were to be "discovery groups for the purpose of exploring man's unique purpose, potential and responsibility before God and fellowman."



Neighborhood Life Group, The Pas

They were to be gatherings for Bible study "for the glory of God and for the edification of His people."

They were to be places where "reading material which would encourage adventurous and abundant Christian living" would be available.

(Official Statement of Purpose, Function and Operation of Neighborhood Life Groups)

Nikkel's philosophy of Mission was a community penetration approach, rather than the traditional church building-centered method. The formation of local church organization should not be hurried. In all Neighborhood Life groups the creed and code of the Mennonite Brethren Church was basic in conducting the Bible study. All participants were informed that the plans and programs of the Neighborhood Life Group would be structured by the people of the group, and not imposed by an external authority. New Christians would organize by mutual consent when the need arose. This organization might be quite different from what was generally called a "church" and some feared that the Conference would object and remonstrate with the group.

Therefore, this appeal came from a prominent member of The Pas group, Henry Toews: "We would ask the parent church to demonstrate leadership which is truly spiritual without petty organizational strings attached. The parent church must trust the group with a blank cheque."

Remembering the controversial experiences with church organizations of former years, the Conference watched the developments at The Pas with curious interest and some apprehension. There were conversions and the questions of baptism and communion became acute. The solution would be to organize a church, for that was the New Testament pattern. Nikkel and the Home Missions Committee seriously pondered the problem and spent much time in prayer. A church would consolidate the believers into a firm and loyal body effective for follow-up and outreach, "assuming the role of burden bearing and spiritual care and admonition."¹⁷

There were more than fifty people involved in the Neighborhood Life Groups. Many of them were still members of other churches. To organize a church would mean a break with their former allegiance. Nikkel suggested keeping the community work intact as Neighborhood Groups and to let another group form with the Mennonite Brethren label. The Neighborhood Life Groups would then gradually become part of the charter group with the MB affiliation.

The Pas group organized into a church with eight members May 1, 1972. They worshipped in the Keewatin Community College with an attendance of around 75. The Neighborhood Life Groups were continuing with marked success. Outreach also included a Dial-a-Meditation, weekend camps, jail visitation, and a men's breakfast club. Increasingly the converts themselves became "fishers of men" and the group grew. A Christian Center program was begun. A storefront office in the downtown area was rented and transformed into a book-nook, reading lounge, a pastor's study, and counselling office. In 1975 the bakery next door to their storefront location on Ross was purchased and renovated. This became the new Christian Center.

At the 1973 convention the Neighborhood Life Church of The Pas was officially accepted as a member of the Mennonite Brethren Conference of Manitoba. Its membership in 1984 stood at twenty-five. Because of economic pressures the working force of the North changes continuously; people move to another northern town or return to southern Manitoba. Twenty-five members in 1984 is, therefore, not an accurate indication of membership in The Pas church. Nikkel estimates that during his seven years in The Pas alone, approximately thirty people were baptized. Today they are scattered all over Canada.

Leaf Rapids

Successful Christian Day Camps were also conducted summer after summer in Cranberry Portage, Snow Lake, and Leaf Rapids. Leaf Rapids, a mining town in the making with an eventual potential population of 3,500, offered a unique opportunity. There were no churches there as yet. To be the first church in a new place was so appealing that the Home Missions Commit-

tee recommended to the 1972 convention that a work be established there. Even before the proposal to the Conference, the Committee had long and serious discussions so that it would be clear about the goals of the new work. Learning from the experience of church organization in The Pas the Committee decided that believers must band together as a church as soon as possible. Since the leader is a Mennonite Brethren worker, he would unreservedly acknowledge his MB allegiance. But the purpose of going into Leaf Rapids was still foremost to bring people to a saving knowledge of Christ.

A Leaf Rapids survey indicated that most residents preferred a non-denominational ministry. The first worship service was called for March 19, 1972. All people interested in a church service were invited. Officials of the Sherritt Gordon Mines and the Leaf Rapids Development Corporation were present. After the worship service a committee of three was formed: A Leaf Rapids resident, a minister from Lynn Lake and James Nikkel. Services were now regularly conducted.

Shortly after this inauspicious beginning the Northern Inter-Church Chaplaincy Committee arranged for a ministry for all Protestants and Anglicans. The Home Missions Committee, remembering their experience with this chaplaincy in Gillam, Manitoba, doubted the wisdom of joining with them. They firmly believed that the town needed an evangelical witness. Prayerfully they discussed it with all concerned and then appointed their workers, the Gilbert Bergs, to begin work in Leaf Rapids in June, 1972. The following year Berg reported: "The Lord is building His church in Leaf Rapids. Its name is Christian Fellowship Group. It is composed of Christians whose goal is to be a demonstration of the Gospel in this community."¹⁸ Berg put a book rack of Christian books in a local store, and showed two feature-length Christian films in the Community Recreation Hall. A junior choir of girls was organized by two ladies of the church. The worship attendance was around fifty with good Sunday school participation. This fellowship was operating with considerable freedom as to membership, though the leader freely acknowledged his Mennonite Brethren affiliation. The members were studying the Mennonite Brethren statement of faith. Jointly they issued a paper, "Membership Requirements," which detailed the conditions for membership in their group. On January 13, 1974, twenty believers openly declared their willingness to be identified with the Christian Fellowship Church as members.¹⁹

Snow Lake

Snow Lake, another mining town, approximately 130 miles northeast of The Pas, with a population of 2,000, had had successful Christian Day Camps for several summers when the question of starting a new work there was seriously considered. Because of limited financial resources of the Conference, the Home Missions Committee had to proceed cautiously in the establishment of new churches.

In 1974 it was decided to send a worker to Snow Lake. The logical choice of a worker was Ken Neufeld who had been the director of the Christian Day

Camps and was doing follow-up work with converts. Ken and Carolee Neufeld were installed in September, 1974.

Again, as in Leaf Rapids, Sunday morning worship services were immediately begun. The first Sunday the Neufelds worshipped as a family, but within six months attendance rose to thirty-seven.

Soon after this humble beginning the Christian Center was opened with a downtown storefront church office, reading lounge, and book nook. During the first three weeks 190 people had visited the Center.

Faithfully the Neufelds ministered to the people. Early in 1975 ten people committed their lives to Christ. The first baptism was in 1977. Their worship facility was very inadequate. Sunday school space was at a premium. Adults discussed lessons in an adjacent hairdresser's shop, while the teens gathered in the furnace room. The need for better accommodation was most obvious during the Sunday services. An area that could seat forty-five was frequently filled with sixty or more. A new building, 70 x 40 feet, was dedicated March 30, 1980.

The organizational process of the Snow Lake group was somewhat slower than in the two other churches of the North. The first five years the pastor made the necessary decisions. The next two years, church membership, its responsibility, its value for the individual as well as for the local group, was studied very seriously. The confession of faith of the Mennonite Brethren was also carefully examined, as well as the church's relationship to the Conference. Then a council was elected to assist the pastor, and on March 25, 1979, the group held its chartering service with eleven members.²⁰

In 1984 there were twenty-six members; many more than that were baptized during the years.

One typical experience is described by the Neufelds: Gary and Holly had a dream of establishing a wilderness commune, accessible only by canoe or snowmobile. They were living together, making plans, and travelling in an old panel truck. In their search for an ideal location, they were drawn to Snow Lake. They arrived in the winter of 1974-75 and found temporary accommodation in a small lamp-lit cabin at the edge of town.

The Christian Center sign on Main Street attracted them because they were looking for information on how to sponsor an overseas child. This initial contact with Ken and Carolee Neufeld developed into friendship.

In a short time, they knelt together to receive Christ as their Savior. Immediately they began to change their lifestyle and their goals. The one romantic dream they clung to, however, was to have an outdoor wedding.

On February 9, 1975 Gary and Holly were married near Snow Lake beside the beautiful Wekusko Falls in a majestic cathedral of jagged rocks, glistening snow, and frost-laden evergreens. It was a warm midwinter day with temperatures at 6 degrees Fahrenheit. As the water tumbled and frothed below, they said their vows to each other.

The newlyweds established a Christian home and freely shared their faith. Through their witness a number of their friends in Snow Lake came to the Lord. Since then they have lived in their native provinces of Saskatchewan

and British Columbia and many of their extended families have become Christians. Their lives are a testimony to "All things have become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).

Grace Church of the Mennonite Brethren Cranberry Portage

In Cranberry Portage, too, the Christian Day Camp had carried on its ministry for years. This town is a tourist center, nestled between two lakes. Its small population of 1,000 swelled during the summer with the coming of tourists who were outfitted there for fishing and hunting in the North. The only Protestant church was a Presbyterian one which had difficulty keeping the pulpit supplied. Likely because of the favourable reputation the Christian Day Camps enjoyed in the North, and, perhaps because a few Mennonites attended the church, an invitation came to the Mennonite Brethren Conference to place a minister there.

In 1978 the Home Missions Committee took over the Presbyterian mission.²¹ The congregation was dissolved as a Presbyterian church and a working relationship with the Mennonite Brethren Mission was established. In the beginning it simply became an affiliated group of the Mennonite Brethren. The attendants of the services did not become Mennonite Brethren members. That was left to the future and their voluntary decision. Transfer of the property was negotiated with the Presbytry, and the church renamed "Grace Church of the Mennonite Brethren."

After the interim pastor, Gary Sawatzky, John Nikkel became, in 1980, the resident minister of Grace Church as well as director of Simonhouse Camp. John and Maryanne involved themselves in community activities, and through these they became well known and appreciated. Their Sunday morning "Adult Bible Coffee" (adults did not like to attend Sunday school!) became an effective evangelistic hour. Most of the participants were non-Christian, but such who desired answers to a superficial or troubled life.²²

In 1982, June 20, a chartering service with ten members was held. A few of the old Presbyterians would not change their allegiance, but regularly and approvingly attended the worship services.

Nikkel writes of one of the joys of this lonely outstation: "Just after Christmas, two years ago, a young man came to my office. He was married and had three lovely children. He was at the end of his rope. He was ready to separate from his wife a constant battle raged between the two. However, he wanted to do anything to keep the family together. Did I have any help for him? We discussed God's plan for man in general specifically for him. He felt insecure. God offers a purpose for life. He wanted God's forgiveness and acceptance. He prayed to admit Christ into his life. A week later his wife came with the same request. She, too, wanted to change her life. We started weekly Bible studies in their home. They struggled with their relationship,

but slowly began to follow God's directives. God is working a healing in the family."²³

Thompson Christian Centre Fellowship, Mennonite Brethren Affiliated

From the very beginning of the northern thrust by the Missions Committee, Thompson was eyed as an evangelistic outreach possibility. Thompson is the largest city of the North. It is in a strategic position as a center for the unification of the northern churches.

There were several reasons why the Committee delayed the establishment of a mission in that city. Thompson has a Mennonite Church as well as a number of evangelical churches. Yet a large percentage of people do not attend any church. After repeated consultations with the Mennonite Church and the Thompson ministerial, it was decided in 1978 to begin another evangelical witness there.

A number of Christian Day Camp programs had already been carried out. The Christian Day Camp office was now transferred from The Pas to Thompson. The church planter was Gary Sawatzky and the lay mission associates, John and Martha Froese.

Sawatzky began immediately with worship services in October of 1979. A core group of four families identified with the ministry. Some twenty-five to thirty-five began to attend the services. Office and worship facilities were rented. In October 1981 the group held a baptism and a chartering service with ten members.²⁴

The northern pastors met people with varied religious or non-Christian backgrounds. One of these surprised Gary and Joyce Sawatzky. Gary writes: "A lady, single, started to come to the church. She was from a strong Mennonite home and knew the Bible well. She began dating a fellow with no church background. He accepted Christ as his Saviour and eagerly began to study the Bible. They were married. Several months later she stood up in church and confessed that just the past week she had received Christ as her Saviour. She said she had seen the way her husband was growing in his faith, and she knew she was missing something. We were filled with joy."²⁵

Recently the Thompson congregation has negotiated the purchase of an apartment building. With the help of volunteers from southern Manitoba this building has been remodelled for the pastor's living quarters, an office, and a roomy sanctuary.

Unique Problems of the North ²⁶

Many people have moved to northern Manitoba to earn money quickly, and then return south again.

Workers are often on shift work, making regular worship patterns difficult.

The smallness of the individual communities reflects every labour and social problem.

Transiency and short term employment hinder stability. This is reflected in the ever-changing membership of the northern churches.

Remoteness and travel difficulties isolate the North. It becomes an escape for religiously disgruntled people and a training ground for inexperienced professionals.

"Much fragmentation and individualistic theology characterizes the North." (Nikkel)

Throughout all these years in the North the workers felt that ignorance of Bible knowledge - the basic Christian tenets - prevented converts from growing and developing into disciples who also would propagate the good news to others. The solution, they thought, was to begin with short-term Bible schools.

Ben Falk

After three northern churches had been established the need for an extra worker was felt; someone who would fill in for a worker on holidays, coordinate the work of the Christian Day Camp, direct short-term Bible courses and be responsible for distribution of literature.²⁷ The Conference in 1975 gave permission to engage such an extension worker for a year. Ben Falk, who had much experience with the Christian Day Camps, was chosen for that position. He did his work so well and made himself so indispensable that the position was extended from year to year. Falk developed a simple study of the basic biblical tenets on the theme, "God's Will for You." He successfully tried these Bible schools in South Indian Lake and in Snow Lake.

As he was flying home in his Cessna 150 to report to a missionary conference, he was overtaken by a snowstorm, and his plane crashed sixty miles south of The Pas. His death was not only a shock and tragedy for the northern Christians, but also for the southern supporters.

At the 1978 convention Jake Kroeker, chairman of the Northern Committee reported: "Ben Falk has left his mark wherever he went. Ben's heart was in the North, with the people there; he was loved by those with whom and for whom he worked so faithfully."²⁸ Carolee Neufeld of Snow Lake wrote: "A tragic accident. And in the same moment a beautiful take-off for Ben Falk. His spirit was airborne into the presence of God."²⁹

Simonhouse Lake Camp

For years the northern Christians had felt the need of a resident Bible camp. Perhaps these believers sensed the need more than their southern brethren and sisters because of their isolation. The Pas Christians had for years planned a camp at Namew Lake. To begin a camp in the wilderness meant building a road, clearing the site, constructing cabins and a lodge. For a small group the difficulties were almost insurmountable. Then in 1976 the Simonhouse Lake Camp came up for sale. Since a camp would be a benefit for all the churches in the North, the Home Missions got involved and with the consent of the Conference Executive this camp was bought for \$6,000, costs to be defrayed by private solicitations. It was an old camp, and needed

repairs, renovations, and equipment.³⁰ This eventually raised the price, after several years of work, to just under \$10,000. With the sale of the Namew Lake Camp, donations, and Conference grant, the amount was covered.

The camp was a unifying factor for the northern churches, permitting the Christians of the North to get together for in-depth Bible study and fellowship.

The Northern District of the Manitoba M.B. Conference



Simonhouse Bible Camp

Establishing five churches in the North in less than ten years created a need of "tying together the existing groups into a region or district" (Nikkel). At the Northern Leadership conference, November 22-23, 1981, in Leaf Rapids, the pastors of the five churches organized the Northern District of the MB Conference. The Manitoba Conference accepted this district as its sixth.

Notes Chapter 11

1. *Minutes of the Manitoba Conference*. 1968, p. 94.
2. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1969, p. 23.
3. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1970, p. 103.
4. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1970, p. 103.
5. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1970, p. 111.
6. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1971, p. 97.
7. Interview. Joe Wiebe, Nov. 23, 1981.
8. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1971, p. 94.
9. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1974, p. 62.
10. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1975, p. 110.
11. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1979, p. 20.
12. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1979, p. 18.
13. A pamphlet describing in detail the Christian Day Camps, (Winnipeg, MB: Mission and Church Extension Office), p. 2.
14. *Manitoba Missions*, #2. A quarterly paper. (Winnipeg, MB: Missions and Church Extension Office, 1970.
15. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1970, p. 95.
16. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1974, p. 59.
17. *Report by the Northern Task Force 1970-71*. (Winnipeg, MB: Missions and Church Extension Office).
18. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1973, p. 29.
19. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1974, p. 63.
20. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1979, p. 17.
21. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1978, p. 87.
22. John Nikkel. *Letter*. May 3, 1983.
23. Nikkel. *Letter*. May 3, 1983.
24. *Manitoba Missions*, Winter. (Winnipeg, MB: Missions and Church Extension Office), 1981.
25. Gary Sawatzky. *Letter*. May 3, 1983.
26. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1976, p. 91.
27. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1975, p. 108.
28. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1978, p. 85.
29. Ben Falk's story written by Carolee Neufeld for the Simonhouse Bible Camp Manual, 1982.
30. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1977, p. 75.

Chapter 12

MISSION AND CHURCH EXTENSION — Part II

A. Suburban Activities

When the Missions Committee studied the suburban situation in Winnipeg, it was found

that most Mennonites live in the suburbs,

that the Mennonite Brethren are scattered to the limits of the city and beyond,

that many travel long distances to the church of their choice (passing a number of other MB churches),

that many live in new areas of rapid growth which have only a weak or no evangelical witness.

The Suburban Commission felt that an evangelical church could be planted in each of these areas, with a nucleus of MB families who live there. With encouragement of their home church and the Missions Committee, these people should be urged to start home Bible studies and small fellowships together with friends and neighbours of non-Mennonite background. The principles that every Christian church is a missionary church and that every Christian a witness to the saving power of Christ would be put to the test in these situations.

The churches were slow to respond and individual believers were either fearful or ignorant how to proceed. Nothing happened for many years.

The North Kildonan MB Church built another church on McIvor Avenue, not prompted by missionary zeal, but simply to accommodate the wish of a large proportion of its members for exclusively English services, and secondly, to relieve congested facilities. Of course, there was the devout hope that the new church would attract many from the community.

In 1978 the Missions Committee recommended Abe Neufeld for a church planting assignment in Winnipeg. He was to research the suburbs for future planting of churches. Demographic studies were made in St. James, Charleswood, St. Vital, Transcona, Valley Gardens, Tyndale Park, Brooklands, and Maples.

Westwood

Priority was given to Westwood. The Mission Board, acting upon the long-standing desire of the Portage Ave. MB Church to plant a church in that area "supplied demographic information and provided James Nikkel as the project facilitator and planner." In 1979 the "Westwood Community Church MB" was organized with Nikkel as interim pastor. The church was accepted that year by the Conference, and on September 1 Travis Reimer assumed the pastorate.

A philosophy of church planting was developed

1. A church is to use its gifts to make disciples and not be satisfied with conversions only. The need of the whole man must be met, for Christians are servants just as Christ was a servant.

2. Church planting is one of the most effective means of evangelism. That was Paul's method. Planting churches also gives order and system to evangelism, and facilitates baptism and teaching of the new converts. With the great mobility of church members, with little or no language barriers, with new developing communities, new churches are the ideal way of conducting evangelism.

3. Immigration, mother-daughter church division, or individual conviction and initiative, have often sparked new churches. The Board, by and large, has considered pioneer mission ventures into new areas, with church growth through evangelism and outreach as its primary mandate. Manitoba Missions has tended to follow the "community-centered church approach."

4. Deeply-committed, responsible and courageous people are needed in this crucial area of work. The workers must have the servant attitude to minister to the whole man, combined with sufficient experience and maturity to carry out the task.¹

Maples

With determination and courage the Board entered new areas. The next attempt was made in the rapidly expanding community of "Maples," the northwest area of Winnipeg. During the summer of 1979 Arthur Kliever was assigned to begin a church there. Pastor Kliever and the Steering Committee first planned the church on paper. In September an inaugural celebration marked the beginning of a new church. Kliever's objective was community penetration. By the New Year, 1980, there were thirty to fifty attendants at worship services in the Arthur Wright School and a baptism was being planned. The church was organized March 30, 1980 with thirteen members. Melvin Freeman became the pastor after Arthur Kliever attempted a new work in Selkirk.

L'Eglise Chretienne Evangelique de St. Boniface

By the gracious leading of the Lord, a church was begun in St. Boniface.

Already as early as 1970 the French suburb was studied and it was found that there were few evangelical churches there. Year after year the Conference urged the Missions Committee to proceed with an outreach into that city. The hindrance was the unavailability of a couple with fluent French.

Ernest Dyck, a church planter from Quebec, was asked to examine the feasibility of establishing a new work in St. Boniface. He stayed for several weeks in the fall of 1972, "surveying and gathering information in order to give directives and assist the Home Missions Committee in such a venture." He visited 342 homes in St. Boniface and forty-two in Ste. Anne. His finding revealed that 30-40 percent were French speaking. This meant that a bilingual church must be established.

Because no worker with acceptable French was found, the St. Boniface topic was completely avoided at the conventions until 1981. In January,



Baptism at L'Eglise Chretienne Evangelique de St. Boniface

1981, a couple who had resided in Quebec for many years and had found the Lord in a remarkable way, and had also been active in church planting in Quebec and Manitoba, was willing to start a work in St. Boniface. Dick Neufeld and his wife Gertrude were first engaged for four months to do research. The four months were extended to one year. Church services were begun on January 10, 1982. Neufeld first conducted an English service and after that a French one. The church was organized in 1984. There are approximately forty-two regular attendants.

Neufeld tells the following story: Gerry Hince was born and raised in St. Boniface. His family were devout Catholics. One day his older brother Ray came home and told the family that he had been marvelously saved, and pointed out many inconsistencies between the Catholic Church and the Bible. The family all believed that the Bible was God's Word, but they had never

read it. One thing that particularly struck Gerry was Ray's insistence that one could definitely know whether one was on the way to heaven or not. In desperation Gerry decided to ask his good friend, the priest. He soon found out that the priest did not have answers and that he did not know the Bible. Gerry decided to find out for himself. Reading his own Bible he soon began to see that what Ray had said was true. He became very open to further discussion and soon received Christ as his Saviour and Lord. By this time Ray was attending the church pastored by Neufeld. The two brothers grew in their Christian life. Their mother, Cecile, distressed at what was happening, decided to start reading the Catholic Bible to prove her sons wrong. She, too, saw that the Bible did not correspond with what she had been taught all her life. She began to come to church with her sons and soon the Word of God bore fruit in her heart.

*Transcona*²

The Board presented a challenge to churches with a membership of 200 or more to plant a church as an extension of their work. The challenge was accepted by four Winnipeg churches, and in 1983 the Transcona Community Church, Mennonite Brethren, was established.

Four neighbouring churches, North Kildonan, Elmwood, McIvor Ave., and River East MB churches, joined together to form a steering committee. Throughout 1982, Home Missions director Ken Neufeld met bi-monthly with this team of eight people. In late summer, Axel and Karen Nast-Kolb, members of the Portage Ave. MB Church who lived in Transcona, were drawn into the committee. Gradually the "core" grew as several other local people were added. In January 1983, after a year of planning, an inaugural service was conducted in the Regent Park Elementary School auditorium. For a year leadership was given by Walter Warkentin and Axel Nast-Kolb. Several members shared in the public ministry. A sense of direction and warm family spirit characterized the new group. Evangelistic home Bible studies and visitation follow-up were the earliest outreach programs. A baptism and chartering celebration in June, 1983, with fourteen members, was attended by many guests from the "mother churches." Ed Hamm became its pastor in 1984.

*Selkirk*²

A vision became a reality in 1984. Church planting in Selkirk had been seriously considered for about twenty years. Research had indicated a need in this city. Financial resources and other priorities of the Mission Board postponed action. In the meantime the General Conference of Mennonites began a small church, and that caused the Board to hesitate again. Emphasis in northern Manitoba in the 70s and in Winnipeg in the early 80s diverted attention from Selkirk.

Eventually former research results were replicated and Selkirk became a priority for planting a new church. The proposal of the Board was accepted by the conference in June of 1983. The Art Klievers, experienced church planters, were approached by the Board to pioneer the work in Selkirk. They

accepted and began preparations in November. Excellent response from the local pastors and the media paved the way. In January, 1984, the first worship service was begun with many guests from the sister churches of Winnipeg.

*Valley Gardens*²

There were no visible churches in Valley Gardens proper, though several churches were just south of it and also to the west across the railway tracks. After the Transcona Church had been organized, the Valley Gardens topic was resumed. A meeting of Winnipeg church leaders, Board members, and Mennonite Brethren residents of Valley Gardens was called. It was well attended and the vision of an MB community church with a very clear outreach purpose was affirmed. For three months the young fellowship held Bible studies in the Ben Thiessens' residence to grow together as brothers and sisters. In January, 1984, the first public worship service was held in a local school with Gilbert Brandt as leader. Though there was encouragement from nearby churches, particularly River East MB Church, the congregation was self-supporting from the outset.

B. Inner City Attempts

The first Inner City Commission had far-reaching plans. Winnipeg's core area was by 1970 settled with Indians, Portuguese, Italians, Blacks, Asiatics. Most of them were poor, and many existed in sub-standard living conditions. To serve these people meant not only to bring them the gospel but also to supply them economically and medically with the necessities of life.

A study of the core area revealed many charitable organizations which concentrated particularly on the economic and medical needs of the people. To



Martin Durksen, ministering to the Spanish.

start one more such agency seemed to duplicate the services and, therefore, a waste of money.

On the other hand there were few which served the spiritual needs of the people. But to give them the gospel without at the same time relieving their needs also did not seem wise. James Nikkel, together with his commission members, developed a large, long-range inner city plan, depicting it with a diagram. (See Appendix).³

An important principle was to relate the "ministry of love and mercy" to a Christian fellowship group so that there would not be a social program without an evangelical emphasis.⁴ This meant that such a service would relate to Salem MB Church. Several factors prevented the implementation of these plans: the exorbitant cost of such procedure and the probable relocation of the Salem church because of the proposed CPR overpass.

Evangelism in the Spanish language was begun as early as 1973 by Martin Durksen.

Living Bible Explorers

By 1971 another plan to serve the core area was discovered by the Board. On his own, George Bock, with a few volunteers, had been evangelistically active in a small inner city area. They called themselves "The Living Bible Explorers." The work consisted of Bible study with adults, and clubs and camping with young people. So successful was this work that more dedicated people were needed to help.

The Inner City Commission, therefore, recommended that a couple be found to assist the Bible Explorers. To keep costs down the couple would take up part-time employment. A home was to be rented for the couple and for their various clubs and meetings.

Home Missions was quite willing to listen to the wishes of the Bible Explorers as to who would be appointed for the task. At the same time it expressed the Conference's goal of establishing an MB fellowship to provide the opportunity for baptism and membership. This program was not nearly as ambitious as the first plan.⁵

Ron and Judy Little were engaged for the work, but stayed only a few months, and were succeeded by Abe and Eva Harder.

In the beginning of this cooperative venture it seemed that the Bible Explorers would become part of the Home Missions work. But that organization was an entity in itself, and although it desired the assistance of the Home Missions, insisted on remaining independent. Abe Harder received his directives from the Bible Explorers and at the same time Home Missions was in a consultative position and paid the bills. It was necessary to clarify the Home Missions relationship to the Living Bible Explorers. It became a question whether the Conference would support the organization without being able to direct the work, or with the support also require representation on their board. The Conference took the latter stand.⁶

Portuguese Mission

At the end of 1973 a rare opportunity presented itself. Linda Banman, a missionary home from Brazil, unable to return to her former field of work, was engaged for full-time service to the Portuguese in Winnipeg, in coopera-



Linda Banman in the Portuguese Ministry

tion with the MB Mission/Services Board. She began with visiting people, having small classes to teach English, and conducting Bible study wherever possible.

Several conversions and baptisms were recorded. In 1978 a Portuguese Bible Conference was held in Salem MB Church with David Franco from Quebec as speaker. The goal of this venture to establish a Portuguese church was not immediately realized, but a group met regularly on Sunday afternoons in the Salem Church with Bruno Wiebe, a recent immigrant from Brazil, as worship coordinator. The Portuguese also met for Bible study on Wednesday evenings at the Christian Resource Centre.

In 1981 Bruno Wiebe became the pastor of the Portuguese congregation. Courageously he and his wife Aneliese served the group on Sunday afternoons. A few families moved away and the group became too small to continue. In 1983 Wiebe resigned and the remaining families joined the Salem MB Church.

All attempts of the Inner City Commission seemed to flounder. Many a plan was created and discarded as unworkable or too expensive. Eventually the commission agreed to establish a Christian Resource Centre for counselling or referrals, in "the main traffic arteries to the Health Sciences Centre."⁷ Such a place would also serve as an administrative office.

Christian Resource Centre

The 1970 plans for the inner city work related directly to the community needs: medical, social, legal, spiritual. This was the "Good Samaritan" model. The cost of such a plan put its implementation "on hold." But the needs remained.

It was not until 1976 that a new project was proposed to the Conference: A Christian Resource Centre, which at the beginning would include a book dis-



John Quiring counselling at the Resource Centre

play, reading lounge, and a counselling ministry. A building at 700 Notre Dame Avenue, across the street from the Health Sciences Centre, became available. The Lord also supplied the counsellor, Paul Patterson, a man who was familiar with the needs of the inner city community. James Nikkel, executive director, moved into the administrative office at 700 Notre Dame.

The Christian Resource Centre became the focal point of an intensive ministry to people who were searching for the kind of help that comes from the Lord. The many conversions led to the development of a regular Monday night fellowship group.⁸ So successful was the counselling, and so time-consuming as well, that the administrative and research work could not be done properly. A new office space, separate from the Christian Resource Centre, was rented at 900 St. James Street.

Here is a summary of a week's work at the Centre: Monday to Friday counselling from 9 to 5; Monday evening group counselling session; Tuesday morning; mission staff prayer meeting; Wednesday evening Portuguese Bible study; Thursday evening prison life class; Friday evening Agape discipleship group; Sunday afternoon worship service with Paul Patterson and Abe Neufeld in charge.

By the middle of 1977 the Christian Resource Centre was in full operation. The curious, the unemployed, the alcoholics, the depressed, the lonely would drop in--browse through the books or read, have a cup of coffee and engage in conversation with the counsellor and volunteers. Through these contacts counselling opportunities developed. These who were helped made the centre known to others. They were invited to a Bible study. An "Alcoholics Victorious" plan was begun on the model of AA with one difference the spiritual



Paul Patterson, front; and James Nikkel

power of AA was clearly identified as Jesus Christ. Patterson called it "a healing liberation ministry."¹⁰

The follow-up, the maturing in faith of new Christians, became a major task. They had to be gathered into a church fellowship to teach them the way of Christ. Patterson knew to direct these people into established churches would be injudicious. Inner city people would not feel at home in a middle-class Mennonite Brethren church. The church must be brought to the people and not the people to the church. A year later worship services were begun in the Christian Resource Centre on Sunday afternoons. Discipleship was a long and sometimes painful process. Patterson found himself in disagreement with the policies of the Board. He resigned in 1979.

John Quiring was then asked to come to the Centre to undertake family counselling and hospital visitation. The building also served as office space for Linda Banman and Bruno Wiebe of the Portuguese Fellowship, and Art Kliever, pastor of the Maples Church.

Cornerstone Christian Fellowship of the MB Church ¹¹

The worship services were discontinued after Patterson left, but counselling by John Quiring was carried on successfully. He became the director of the Center.

After an absence of three years Paul Patterson was offered the position of church planter at the Christian Resource Center. The goal was to establish a church in which converts could grow and become stable disciples. It would be an MB church but not necessarily follow all the rules and regulations of the Conference.

In the fall of 1982 Patterson began to gather the Christians again. In April, 1983, a fellowship was begun with the intention of organizing as soon as possible. The Confession of Faith of the MB Church was studied and accepted. There was some disagreement with the "Church Covenant."

In the expectation of a chartering service the Christian Resource Center was remodeled to provide a small assembly room. On November 13, 1983 the renovated building was dedicated, a chartering service conducted with nineteen members, and a baptism and communion service held.

The new members were encouraged to fellowship with other Christians, talk to each other about spiritual issues, and speak of their faith boldly to unbelievers. Bible study and Sunday worship were learning events where anybody could ask questions. The pastor's message was always followed by a discussion period.

In 1984 the church had twenty members. This church, too, as the northern ones, because of economic pressures, experienced a constant shifting of membership. Through the years there have been approximately fifty conversions.

Director of Home Missions



The Ken Neufeld Family

After James Nikkel's resignation in 1981 Ken Neufeld became the interim director and in 1982 was appointed the full time director.

The Vietnamese/Chinese Church (Mennonite Affiliated)

Through the efforts of Mennonite Central Committee several Mennonite churches sponsored Vietnamese and Chinese refugees to come to Canada. Many of these immigrants attended the worship services of the sponsoring churches. A number of them learned English quickly, and a few became Christians and were baptized. There was, however, a real need to offer services in their own language. The North Kildonan MB Church did that for some time. Then the MCC helped to organize a Vietnamese/Chinese Church in the Home Street Mennonite Church in April, 1983. The pastor couple was James and Rebecca Ho Dung, members of the River East MB Church.

MCC organized an Advisory Council consisting of members from the Mennonite General Conference (GC), the Mennonite Brethren (MB), the Evangelical Mennonite Church (EMC), and the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church (EMMC). This council assists in the financial, administrative, and spiritual ministry of the Church. The Mennonite Brethren Conference subsidized the church with \$5,000 in 1984. There were twenty-six members at the installation of James Ho Duong as pastor, May 6, 1984. He reported that ten more were baptized in August, 1984.

Cooperative Mission Ventures

The Mission Board reported, "One of the distinctive of the Mennonite Brethren is their openness toward other Christian causes. In Manitoba we have for many years been involved in cooperative Christian ministries. Our participation has been at various levels; in some it has been organizationally, some financially and some program participation."¹²

Hospital Chaplaincy

Manitoba has an Inter-Faith Advisory Board, a sponsoring body for all authorized hospital chaplains. Its function is to make sure that all hospitals are provided with a Protestant chaplain. The Missions Committee was a member of this Board. Half the salary of the chaplains is paid by the government and the rest by the various denominations. Such a chaplain is officially authorized to minister to all patients. The Missions Board was not completely satisfied with the work of the chaplains and through the years asked men within the Conference to work in this area. It first engaged Cornelius Wall, then for many years Joe Wiebe, and at the present, John Quiring (half-time).

Resort Ministry

The Missions Committee helped to plan the Inter-Faith ministry in the Whiteshell Provincial Park, but did not participate in the program until the summer of 1984. The Lutheran Church, which had been responsible until then, discontinued its work. The Mission Board promised to carry on the

work for two years.

Gillam Inter-Faith Ministry

The electrical power development of Kettle Rapids on the Nelson River created an industrial town, Gillam. The Missions Committee was represented on the Inter-Faith Board since the early 70s and made a token contribution to the work. Occasionally it was able to send an assistant to the chaplain for a few months. In 1974 several MB young people assisted Chaplain Friesen in a special summer thrust.

The Missions Committee experience at Gillam was not always a happy one, and when the Inter-Faith group also began a ministry in Leaf Rapids, it declined to participate.

Book Rack Evangelism

Mennonite Brethren in the Book Rack Evangelism of "Choice Books" consists of a member on its Board and a contribution of \$1,000. The Choice Books racks are available in all northern churches.

Notes Chapter 12

1. *Minutes of the Manitoba Conference*. 1980, p. 41.
2. Information given by Ken Neufeld of the Missions and Church Extension Office, Manitoba Mennonite Brethren Conference, 1984.
3. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1970, p. 98.
4. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1970, p. 96.
5. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1971, p. 92.
6. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1974, p. 66.
7. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1976, p. 93.
8. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1978, p. 84.
9. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1979, p. 17.
10. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1978, p. 88.
11. *Interview*. Paul Patterson, Sept. 14, 1984.
12. *Report of the Mission Board to the Conference, Manitoba Conference Minutes*. 1974, p. 64.

Chapter 13

RADIO AND MENNONITE BRETHREN COMMUNICATIONS

A. Beginnings

The English Program

A few Mennonite Brethren Bible College students with burning hearts for evangelism, assisted William Falk, the city missionary, in his street meetings in the early 40s. The need and the urgency of bringing the good news to all people impressed itself upon them. Radio would be the ideal way to accomplish that, they felt. These students, Henry Brucks, Henry Poetker, Henry Schroeder, and Wilbert Loewen, began to pray earnestly about his matter. They had no money or financial backing, yet they became convinced that the Lord wanted them to broadcast his Word over the radio.

Full of fire and faith they presented their plans to the teachers of the College, hoping to find encouragement and a way to achieve their desire. The "cold water" of superior experience was poured upon their youthful enthusiasm. Unperturbed, the students got detailed information for airing a program. They were told it would cost \$54 for twenty-five minutes. The four had \$2 among them.

Again they faced the faculty of the College, but found no understanding. The teachers doubted that the students were capable of such a large task. Brucks, the spokesman for the group, and preparing to serve in foreign missions, could not understand their cautious stance. Disillusioned and disappointed, he was ready to leave the College. Dr. A.H. Unruh, seeing the sincerity and the deep faith of the students relented and gave Brucks \$20 toward this undertaking.

Encouraged, the students held an extra meeting with the faculty. Aware of the students' determination and faith in God's provision and power, the faculty reluctantly granted their wishes with the following stipulations: the students would be strictly on their own; they could not depend on support from

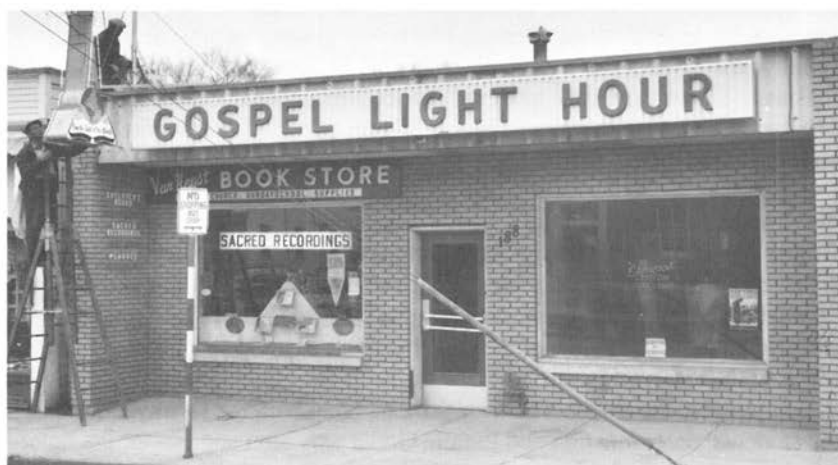
the College, financial or otherwise; they were not to use their MB connections or the name of the College; they were not to ask for support from the Conference or the MB churches.¹

The young men signed a contract with CKRC for a year. God eminently rewarded their faith. Without financial appeals they were still able to pay their bills and enthusiastically air the Word of God. Dr. Unruh, in his many travels to churches, occasionally let people know what was happening in Winnipeg, and appealed for support. The program, in effect, a non-denominational venture of faith was announced as such at every broadcast. It was not until 1953 that the non-denominational label was discontinued and the program was called simply "The Gospel Light Hour."²

The first broadcast was aired February 23, 1947. Henry Brucks was the speaker and Henry Poetker the announcer and program director. The format of the program was unadorned — simply singing and a message. These men had no particular philosophy in producing their programs. Their goal was to proclaim the gospel sincerely and effectively and to win people for Christ.³

At the convention that same year these students gave a brief report why the broadcast was begun and what they wanted to achieve. They desired the blessing of the churches for this important evangelistic work. After a lively discussion the following position was taken by the convention: "That the radio work is appreciated by the Conference and should be continued on a voluntary basis in connection with city mission."⁴ This did not mean that the radio work was now being directed by the City Mission Committee, but that mature advice could be given to the radio committee, which at that time consisted exclusively of young people, mostly students.

The 1948 report stated that the Lord had provided for all financial obligations, that many people of various denominations and cultural background were listening, that people received guidance through the broadcasts, and that a young man had found salvation.⁵ After 1948, Poetker and Brucks served as



Gospel Light Hour

missionaries in India and Congo (Zaire) respectively, and Peter R. Toews, also a student at the college, took over as speaker and director of the broadcasts. The Conference decided to give Toews a \$10 monthly living allowance.⁶ A year later another student, Henry C. Born, served in that capacity (1949-50). The Conference began to support radio evangelism with \$20 a month.

Year after year the Gospel Light Hour reported to the conventions of the Manitoba Conference without actually being a part of it. Eventually the delegates felt that the radio program belonged to them, and that with the partial support they should also have decision-making powers. In 1954 the Gospel Light Hour officially became an organ of the Manitoba Conference and a radio committee was elected by the convention.⁷

Until 1950 the speakers and the singers changed every year, because the students left Winnipeg after graduation. Now John M. Schmidt was engaged to become speaker and director of the Gospel Light Hour. He lent stability to the programs, and remained in this position until 1963.



John M. Schmidt

This weekly English program was aired continuously from 1947 to 1976 (from CFAM, Altona since 1957). An evaluation study in 1970 revealed that there were several similar programs and that, because the messages were directed to non-Christians, they should not be broadcast from CFAM, Altona. An effort should be made to render it more attractive. But, since letter response and requests for counselling had actually increased, this was continued (and paid by the Canadian Board of Evangelism) until 1973. At that time it was reduced to a fifteen minute program called "Perspectives," "with a more contemporary emphasis" to reach young people.⁸ Producer Jake Schmidt wrote: "It professes to take

a look at life with its many related questions. . . . We talk about how different people cope with the needs in their lives and then suggest that there is an alternative to the way they are experiencing life. We declare ourselves willing to share with them in a more personal way, what Jesus means to us, and what he offers to be to them. This sharing can take place through correspondence, via telephone or else through a personal visit to our offices. . . . We have had several fruitful contacts in terms of conversions, re-dedications, and also problem-solving relationships. We look upon this program as a missionary outreach."⁹ The difficulty was to find suitable time slots for this program and eventually it was discontinued in 1975 when Jake Schmidt resigned from his work.

The original English program, therefore, had been broadcast for twenty-six years with three years added as "Perspectives."

Summary of speakers:

Henry Brucks	1947-1948
Peter R. Toews	1948-1949
Henry Born	1949-1950
John M. Schmidt	1950-1963 and various others for short periods
William Schmidt	1964-1967
Rudie Willms	1967-1969
Jake Schmidt	1969-1973 (first as coordinator and then as speaker)

"Perspectives"

Jake Schmidt	1973-1975
--------------	-----------

B. Program Expansion

The German Program

During John Schmidt's term of service the Gospel Light project expanded remarkably. In 1956 a German half-hour program was begun, "*Licht des Evangeliums*," with A.H. Unruh first for a few months¹⁰ and later with Hein-



Heinrich Regehr

rich Regehr as speakers.¹¹ Both of them were notable expositors of the Word of God. The messages were, therefore, almost exclusively directed to Christians, to give them insight, spiritual strength, courage, and comfort. This half-hour program enjoyed great support from the German-speaking people of Manitoba and also other parts of Canada. It was accepted by HCJB, Quito, and highly appreciated by Germans of South America and Europe. With an

interruption of two years, during which Gerhard Fast was speaker, Heinrich Regehr continued steadfastly and with warm acclaim until 1973. Many a thankful note and a generous donation reached the office of the Gospel Light Hour.

Just a few responses: "Your broadcasts are the daily bread for my soul" (Brazil); "There is hardly a day that your broadcasts are not included in our prayers" (Argentina); "I am so happy that I also now can say 'Christ receiveth sinful men'" (Manitoba).

In 1973 Heinrich H. Janzen became the speaker of "*Licht des Evangeliums*," and remained until his untimely death in March, 1975. Martin Durksen successfully carried on after him until 1980. He was followed by Gerhard Friesen and in 1982 by Abe Quiring. To put more emphasis on evangelism in this program and at the same time save expenses, "*Licht des Evangeliums*" was changed from a half-hour Sunday morning release to a fifteen minute program heard five evenings a week. *Familienandacht*, begun as a fifteen minute release in 1957, was also discontinued in 1983.

Occasionally among the thousands of letters received, someone asked for counselling. All such requests were answered by the speakers. Wherever possible follow-up was done personally. People were being saved, others were guided to accept God's inimitable but wise leading, comforted in their grievous trials, or strengthened in their faith.

1957 was a year of great expansion. In that year, Altona CFAM radio station was built, giving the Gospel Light House the opportunity of extra programs at reasonable prices. The first two programs were Morning Devotion (*Familienandacht*) and Evening Devotion. H. Regehr had the German program and John Schmidt, and various other ministers, the English one.

These programs provided the Gospel Light management with valuable broadcasting experience for future undertakings.

Children's Gospel Light Hour

Also in 1957 a Children's Gospel Light Hour was begun with Toby Voth (Uncle Toby) as speaker, Kay Wiens as the story teller, and Frieda Duerksen as the choir director. The choir had more than forty enthusiastic children. After 1966 Jake Schmidt served as speaker. This release was terminated in 1970.

The Russian Program

The greatest venture in that eventful year (1957) was the beginning of a Russian program. David B. Wiens, who had been a missionary worker to the Russians in northern Saskatchewan for many years, and who was the pastor of the 43rd Avenue MB Church in Vancouver, was engaged as the speaker. He produced the messages in Vancouver. A choir of Mennonite immigrants, still familiar with the Russian language, was organized by Cornelius Balzer. Later David Durksen took over that responsibility, and Heinz Cornies from 1972 to 1975.

The original motive for a Russian program was to reach the Russian

people of the prairies. The program, therefore, was broadcast from a station in Saskatoon. The response from these people was minimal. Schmidt



David B. Wiens

then turned to HCJB in Quito, Ecuador. That station gladly accepted it. Ever since then the program has been aired from Quito. Stations like Bonaire, Incheon, Monaco, Alaska, Korea, Lisbon, Manila and Guam have also occasionally released this program free.

Responses from Russia are heartwarming: "In 1968 was the first time I heard your program, and God's Word changed my life completely. . . . I was a teacher for 17 years, but now I am compelled to leave my profession; now I am a janitor and street cleaner."

"On July 5, 1975, I repented of my sins and was baptized on September 1. I have great need of spiritual food. I would like to have a Bible."

D.B. Wiens died in 1980 and Victor Hamm, a recent immigrant from Russia who had assisted in the preparation of the broadcasts since 1977, is continuing Wiens's rewarding work. A Youth program, using contemporary music and speaking to the young people of Russia in today's language, has been added. The songs are written by young Russian Christians. They arrive at the MB Communication's office in handwritten form and are arranged by musicians of the studio's music department. A library of 100 contemporary songs has been produced.¹²

Low German Program

The Gospel Light Committee also remembered the Mennonites who prefer to speak Low German. In 1959 John J. Neufeld, at that time field man of Home Missions, was asked to begin a Low German program. This release gained great acclaim and its messages were desired wherever Mennonites lived in Mexico, Honduras, Belize, Bolivia, and Paraguay. The programs

were distributed in cassette form since these countries, except Paraguay, do not permit religious broadcasting. These messages were especially approved by the southern Manitoba Mennonites.

Neufeld added personal counselling and evangelism to his program. An average of 150 days a year is spent in ministering in churches, schools, and community halls. He has held evangelistic meetings in most of the countries mentioned above and in Manitoba. An often repeated question is "Why have you waited so long to bring us the Word so clearly?"

One of the many experiences Neufeld can relate is the following: "A 75-year-old man, an alcoholic and a mocker, who listened to no sermons, was persuaded by his wife to listen to the Low German program. His reaction; 'That was good!' I was allowed to visit him and spoke to him about his salvation. I prayed with him. Soon after that he died. His last words were 'I am going home!'."

Neufeld writes, "Low German is much more profound, clear and meaningful to them, because Low German is the language they understand." Of his counselling and evangelistic work he writes, "This service is in no way confined to Mennonites or to Low German speaking people only. In my public ministry I serve people all the way from Catholics to Old Colony Mennonites, from university educated people to illiterates. In all classes of people I can help some."¹³

This distinctive Mennonite dialect had not as yet been reduced to a written language and Neufeld had to translate the Bible references he used in his messages into some acceptable form. He translated Thessalonians and Ephesians and continued on through the rest of the New Testament, when Wycliffe Bible Translators became aware of his work. With their expertise and assistance the translation was polished and printed. Neufeld also translated some of the songs used by the Gospel Light Quartet.¹⁴

In 1981 J.J. Neufeld reported to the Conference that he had prepared 3,170 programs, to the glory of God and the blessing of thousands of listeners.

With the phenomenal expansion in the radio ministry new facilities were urgently needed. Staff members, singers in the various groups, and many good friends collected money to buy a parcel of land. The Conference advanced the money for a building, an amount later repaid by special donations. The new facilities consisted of six offices, broadcast rooms, and technical equipment rooms.¹⁵

A printing press was added. Many of the sermons, German and English, were printed in tract form and distributed to those who requested them. These tracts were available in literature racks in churches, doctors' offices, businesses, hospitals, prisons, and public institutions. Children's correspondence courses and teen talks were also offered.

The first GLH programs were produced live from CKY studio. Later, in 1953, when the group was able to buy the necessary equipment, programs were put on tape, sometimes in private homes, but mostly in the Logan Ave. Mission Church. This meant that all the program participants had to be present at that time. Still later, after a studio had been built and the technical

control room equipped, the various parts of a program were taped at times convenient to the participants and then skillfully assembled by the technicians.

Music was, and is, an important part of each program. Quartets, trios, duets, choir, (English, German, Russian, male, mixed, and children's) were organized on a voluntary basis. More than a hundred singers faithfully offered their time without remuneration. A number of singers have served for many years. Songs were put on tape, and kept in the music library with detailed information as to theme, number of verses, length of time. The music is catalogued and readily accessible. For many years John Klassen has been the music director. His father, Cornelius Klassen, has coordinated the songs for each program.

Teen Program

In 1966 a fifteen minute program for teens was added, and in 1969 "Words for Women." Rudie Willms produced the Teen program and his wife, Louise, Words for Women.

The Teen program, an attempt to reach young people with contemporary music and topics of interest to them, was aired three times a week. In 1970 this program was discontinued, because a popular teen program from Minnesota was successfully broadcast.

Words for Women was aired once a week from Altona and from Dauphin. It received many complimentary letters. Agnes Schmidt continued the program after Louise Willms. Letters commended her talks highly: "You have that down-to-earth friendly approach that we need so much these days"; "I find your thoughts very helpful in our married life."¹⁶ Agnes Schmidt had many opportunities to speak to women's organizations. This program was discontinued in 1977 and two-minute spots substituted in order to reach unchurched women also. A total of 65 spots were produced by Agnes Schmidt.¹⁷

Gospel Light Hour had become an effective outreach program for the Manitoba brotherhood. Many counselling sessions were held, many people were encouraged to persevere in their Christian walk, a few found Christ as their personal Saviour, (perhaps many more than reported).

Besides these many benefits, the opportunities given to Christians to witness and to participate in the production of broadcasts has been of supreme value. The 1981 annual report stated, "We estimate 5,000 man-hours of free time and effort are volunteered annually by Board members, singers, musicians, actors and mail packers."¹⁸

A name change for the radio work had been discussed for several years. The original program, Gospel Light Hour, which had given the entire ministry its name, had been discontinued; nor was any program an hour long. In 1976, the broadcast ministry was renamed Mennonite Brethren Communications (MBC).

When the Conference took over the administration of the radio work, it supported it only partially. The greater part of the expenses were to be covered by solicitations from listeners. In 1956, GLH's total income was

\$7,741.20. Ten years later it was reported that receipts amounted to \$89,537.98, of which 59 percent were donations, 19 percent a grant from the Manitoba Conference, 16 percent a subsidy from the Foreign Missions Board and 6 percent from miscellaneous sources.¹⁹ Again ten years later, 1976, the income was \$198,958.03, 11 percent of which came as a grant from the Conference.²⁰ In 1982 the total income was \$515,072 of which Manitoba churches had contributed 74 percent.²¹ Although the grant from the Conference steadily increased in number of dollars, percentage-wise it decreased and the freewill offerings multiplied remarkably.

Television Productions

For many years the radio committee seriously discussed the possibility of producing TV programs. The Conference also urged the Committee to research this medium. There was no doubt that television was an acceptable method of evangelism, but the exorbitant costs of production discouraged its implementation.

A unique opportunity presented itself in 1967. The Churchill closed circuit TV station accepted a program using slides with Christian comments. This brief experiment was the beginning of MBC-TV.²²

Year after year the Conference pressed the committee to investigate ways that might lead to the use of TV, but the costs always discouraged the realizations of the vision.

In 1970, Channel 7 in Winnipeg granted the use of its studio for the production of a half-hour program. The format was a dramatized sermon. Yet it seemed that costs definitely stalled the showing of it. Repeatedly the conviction was put forth that such a tremendous undertaking should be attempted by the Canadian Conference or in cooperation with other Mennonite and evangelical groups.

Two years later MB Communications joined the Mennonite Radio and Television Council (MRTC). The result was radio and TV spots in English and in French. These were readily accepted by CBC-TV and CTV, locally and nationally. They were shown without cost to MBC.

Now the conference adopted the recommendation to produce a weekly half-hour program for Cable TV (again with free air time), sponsor a children's TV program produced by Scripture Union on a local station, research the production of its own children's TV program, and develop plans for a youth program.

A series of programs for Cable TV called "Dimensions in Living" was produced and shown locally for eight months at very little cost. A Fort Garry Church group Gareth and Elsie Neufeld, and Don Falk produced an adult program called "It's a Long Way to Heaven" for that series.

All these efforts provided the staff with a learning experience in their new medium. Then the Lord opened doors in a way no one had expected. Since the CRTC (Canadian Radio and Television Council) had ruled that a certain number of hours of television time must be Canadian productions, and since these were not readily available, free release time was given for any excellent

Canadian-produced TV programs. Therefore, the recommendation to produce a thirteen week series of children's television, as well as the production of six special programs asked for by CKY-TV, was quickly endorsed by the Conference. The latter series, "Plain Folk" was released in 1976.

Lorlie Barkman, who joined MBC in 1975 to plan and produce children's TV programs, was hard at work. The staff often consulted television professionals to ensure a technically acceptable production. The real goal was, of course, to teach basic biblical principles to non-churched children aged 10-12.

By 1977, the thirteen week series, "The Third Story" was completed. Themes like the Bible, self-worth, Jesus Christ, loneliness, making decisions, and so on were used. The series was accepted locally as well as in four other provinces, and released at no cost to MBC. The production costs, however, were above \$70,000. A second series of the Third Story was started in 1978 at a cost of \$80,000. Both series were highly praised by the stations. In 1981 the third series was completed. The next efforts, known as the Family Television Series, were directed more to adults.

Cassettes

A cassette ministry has been added for the many people who cannot listen to the MBC programs. These are available in German, Russian, and Low German. The last are particularly desired in Central America where religious broadcasting is prohibited.

C. Goals



The Present MB Communications Building

Mennonite Brethren Communications has always, from the very beginning

of broadcasting, whether through radio or TV, endeavoured to speak relevantly and with love and understanding to people "across the whole spectrum of needs;"²³ to present Christ to non-Christians; to assist believers in their spiritual struggles; to lead, by serious Bible study, those who would like to know God better; to awaken the indifferent, and guide the errant, misinformed or inexperienced. It desires to comfort, counsel, and encourage.

This high goal demanded that the staff constantly evaluate every program and change, improve, delete, or devise new ones; always looking for better ways - "fresh colors" - to communicate "old truths," and mindful also of new technological developments.

The MBC Board expressed its goal in a 1978 document as follows:

1. In general the mission of the Mennonite Brethren Communications is to use communication media at present primarily radio and television to call persons to commitment and life in Jesus Christ, and to influence, in accordance with Christian principles, the values and morals of individuals in society.

2. MBC will undertake, insofar as it is possible, program projects which are not being undertaken by other evangelical communicators.

3. The board and staff of MBC will seek God's guidance in making program decisions so that a positive and clear Christian message is conveyed, and select communications techniques, not for their own sake, but for their appropriateness to the purpose of the program.²⁴

NOTES Chapter 13

1. Interview. Henry Brucks, April 27, 1982.
2. *Minutes of the Manitoba Conference*. 1953, p. 71.
3. Interview. Henry Brucks.
4. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1947, p. 12.
5. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1948, pp.10-11.
6. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1948, p. 11.
7. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1954.
8. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1973, p. 17.
9. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1974, p. 41.
10. Interview. John Schmidt.
11. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1956, p. 11.
12. Interview. Victor Hamm, 1983.
13. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1975, p. 81.
14. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1981, p. 26.
15. The Mennonite Brethren Communications building on Henderson Highway, was built in 1960.
16. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1971, p. 42.
17. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1977, p. 85.
18. *MBC Backgrounder*. 1981, p. 4.
19. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1966, p. 77.
20. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1976, p. 31.
21. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1982, p. 95.
22. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1967, p. 25.
23. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1980, p. 110.
24. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1978, p. 13.

Much of this chapter's information was gleaned from several interviews with Neil Klassen, M.B. Communications Director, 1983.

PART V

STRENGTHEN YOUR
STAKES (Isa 54:2)

Chapter 14

STRENGTHENING CHURCH ACTIVITIES

A. Sunday School

Sunday school has been part of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Manitoba from its beginning. In Burwalde it had a somewhat faltering start because there were no trained teachers. But from 1896 on, Sunday school was taught regularly. In the Winkler minutes of 1908 there is mention of a Sunday school convention, although the information does not reveal who organized it, what the program was, who the speakers were or what it achieved. By 1919 Sunday school was one of the most active organizations in the Winkler Church.¹

When the immigrants from Russia arrived in 1923, all activities in the Winkler Church were still conducted in German. The Sunday school may have been close to introducing English, but the large wave of German-speaking newcomers postponed the change. The Winkler Bible School sustained that status quo.

Sunday School Lessons

Christian Education courses were a large part of the Bible School's curriculum, for its aim was to prepare workers for the churches. But its teaching methods were European, and Sunday school work was taught according to European pedagogical books.² Not until A.A. Kroeker, who had received his training at Biola, Los Angeles, became a teacher, was any English introduced. Gradually American Sunday school material found its way into the Bible School and from there into the churches. Sunday school material in German was not available. American Sunday school lessons were inexpensive, easy to use, graded according to age, and with background material added. This appealed to busy SS teachers who had little time to prepare.

The introduction of American material created stress and turmoil - on one side German language and European culture, and on the other English language and American culture. Parents required the translation of the English

lessons. Much of this was done by G.D. Pries, A.H. Unruh, and John G. Baerg. The lessons were not merely translated but also adapted to conform with MB principles.

Other problems had to be overcome. Most children were raised using the Low German language, and very few had been taught to read and write the High German. They were unable to do the Sunday school homework properly. A desperate appeal was made to all churches to establish German Saturday schools, or where the public school had a Mennonite teacher, to have German classes taught either before 9 a.m. or after 4 p.m. The appeal was double-barrelled: parents were urged to speak High German with their children to make the learning of German easier. This last appeal was often repeated from the pulpit. In spite of all these efforts the children were frustrated, and often the parents as well, for they had to assist with the homework; the teachers were thwarted in their progress because the children just had not done their lessons.³

With all these difficulties the lessons received the major share of blame. Many teachers discontinued using them, or modified them, or did not require homework. Other churches reverted to *Biblische Geschichten* (Bible stories). Parents were urged again and again to encourage their children to do their homework.

Gradually, in spite of Conference warnings about its emphases, churches began to use Scripture Press material.

In the 1950s the Mennonites of eastern U.S.A. were writing their own Sunday School material. The Canadian MB Christian Education Committee participated in the preparation and the lessons were also issued with an MB imprint. These lessons were thorough and were permeated by a Mennonite theological perspective. They also required the teacher to do a great deal of independent preparation. All churches began to use these lessons.

By the 1960s, mutterings were again heard that lessons were too difficult and entailed too much preparation time. Many churches, in spite of the urgings of the Christian Education Committee, reverted to Scripture Press lessons. Thousands of dollars worth of MB imprint Sunday school material could not be sold, and was kept in storage in Winnipeg for years.

As times went on the Sunday school superintendents, and the teachers as well, became more independent of the Conference committee and began to shop for their own material. At the present time there is no uniformity in the use of Sunday school material in the Manitoba church. Approximately 40 percent use Scripture Press, 25 percent Gospel Light, 15 percent David C. Cook material. A few churches are experimenting with the "Foundation Series" issued by the Mennonite Church of America.⁴

Sunday School Leadership Training

The Bible School undertook the task of training Sunday school teachers long before the Conference acknowledged a duty to serve the churches with it. Not nearly all young people were able to attend Bible School to receive instruction in SS teaching. To relieve that situation the Bible School offered

week-long courses. SS teachers were attracted to come to Winkler for that time. There was, however, a need for more training. The Bible School teachers began to take the courses to outlying churches for a weekend. To encourage and inspire Sunday school teachers the Bible School, on its own initiative, also organized annual SS conventions. Not only did these generate enthusiasm, but they also unified SS efforts, gradually persuading all churches to adopt the recommended graded lessons. Three to six courses were taught by A.H. Unruh and A.A. Kroeker in five districts: East, West, Winkler, Winnipeg, Springstein.⁵

In 1937 the SS convention was held in Winnipeg. At this convention the teachers elected a committee to promote Sunday school work. Its members were A.A. Kroeker, Dietrich Esau, Jacob Wedel, Henry H. Redekopp, and Isaac Redekopp.

At the next year's Manitoba MB convention a few delegates expressed dissatisfaction with the Sunday school situation in their home churches. Now the Conference realized the need to help. It proposed to elect a committee and give it conference authority. When the convention was told that a committee already existed, it authorized that committee, giving it conference non-standing status.

This committee organized special SS teachers' meetings in churches and conventions in each district. The 1943 report stated that there had been Sunday school workshops in eight places, that thirteen churches used graded lessons, one church supplemented them with *Biblische Geschichten*, and three churches used both. All of them taught in German, except for three, which were bilingual.

When the Mennonite Brethren Bible College was established, five-day Sunday school courses were offered as early as 1945. These courses took the place of the local ones. The district Sunday school conventions were still continued. The last few years Christian Education Conferences have been held, called either by the Canadian Committee or by the Manitoba one.

When the Northern District was organized and added to the five southern ones, a Christian Education conference was held in Thompson in 1983.

The present Committee senses a need in the areas of recruitment, curriculum, and leadership training. The Committee is ready to serve the churches upon an invitation.⁶

Mission Sunday School and DVBS

Throughout the years the Sunday school committee encouraged the churches to have mission Sunday school and DVBS in the neighbourhoods about them without an evangelical witness. Establishing such was no problem in the Winkler area, for English-speaking missionary-minded people could easily be found. It took longer in the immigrant churches, though, not because of a lack of missionary conviction, but because it took some time before the young people spoke English fluently and had the confidence to move out into non-Mennonite districts. The reticence they felt as immigrants may have also been a factor. It was easier to begin with DVBS, first in the home church and

then beyond. The home attempts were not satisfactory because it was difficult to persuade Canadian-born non-Mennonites to attend an immigrant church. For that reason DVBS's were preferably held in local schools.

The most successful period of mission Sunday schools were the years 1955-61. In 1959 there were fourteen such schools. There are no statistics of such schools today. DVBS is still conducted in some churches. The highest number of DVBS's was in 1965, with twenty-one.

*Table 26*⁷

Sunday School attendance

	1946	1951	1956	1961
S.S. pupils	1288	1933	2956	4286
S.S. workers	204	294	384	557
	1966	1971	1976	1981
		4589	4012	3691
		723	678	637

In the 1940s the problem of language became acute in a few churches, but it was not until the end of the 1950s that most Sunday school classes were taught in English. Statistics are not reliable, because some churches report the status of all classes from primary to adult and others do not. In 1961 there were eleven churches that used only English in Sunday school, six churches 50 percent, and five churches all German. One year later statistics state that ten churches were teaching in English, seven had 90 percent English and eight churches still had between 25-50 percent in German.⁸ Today the primary to Young People's classes are all in English as well as some adult classes. A few senior classes are still taught in German.

The family midweek program was begun in 1969. The attempt at that time was to have adult Bible study, clubs (Pioneer Girls, Boys Brigade) and choir practice on Wednesday nights, in order to have more free evenings for the families. This was not possible in most churches, however, because of inadequate facilities. The Sunday school committee, known in recent years as Christian Education Committee,⁹ is also directing the Pioneer Girls, Boys Brigade and Christian Camping programs.

Music and Choirs

Music has always been an integral part of Mennonite life, and not only in church but at home as well. Although the early Mennonites allowed only serious old hymns in church, sung rather dolefully and lethargically, outside of church the younger people sang gospel songs and even (secretly) secular ones. Before the MB church was organized Hoffnungsfeld had a group of people who occasionally came together to sing gospel songs in four-part harmony, simply for the joy of it.

In 1904 the Winkler MB members organized the first choir. Actually it was only an enthusiastic group without a leader, and they did not sing in church.

But they were so eager in their singing that the church became somewhat apprehensive and sounded a warning not to take part in "worldly choirs."¹⁰ The Winkler minutes do not elaborate or define "worldly choirs," and one can only guess that they may have been the occasional "*Brummtopf*" groups that sang and played noisily at New Years.¹¹

Peter Dyck became the first choir leader, and in quick succession there followed Jacob B. Penner, Peter Klassen, and Peter H. Neufeld. In 1906 Jacob A. Kroeker took over the choir leadership and continued in that capacity till 1941.¹² In the first years the choir sang occasionally during worship services. In 1912 it was asked to sing every Sunday. The church realized not only the aesthetic value of hymns but particularly the importance of praise of God through songs. Singing to the honor of God always raised the spiritual level of worship, they found, not only beautifying the services but also preparing peoples' minds and hearts for God's message.

In 1912 the Northern District Conference choir directors created a society for the purpose of fostering better singing. Whether J.A. Kroeker was part of it is not known. In 1913 the Manitoba churches (Winkler, Grossweide, Kronsart) joined the Northern District Conference and the efforts of the society were emphasized at its conventions. The churches were urged to sing the old "*Kernlieder (um) den Gemeindegesang zu heben*" (to sing the old core hymns to improve worship singing). It tried to introduce a common hymnal for the churches and encouraged *Saengerfeste* (song festivals). Whether its choice of a hymnal was *Evangeliumslieder* cannot be ascertained, but from that time this hymnal of gospel songs was in common use.¹³

The Winkler church choir sang a cappella until 1921. At that time it bought a small reed organ.

When the immigrants from Russia established churches in the 1920s, they too, quickly organized choirs wherever there was a sufficient number of members. Most of the leaders were inexperienced and musically unqualified. They just loved to sing and the church would choose the most suitable, willing man to undertake the task. The greatest problem in the early years was to find choir songs so that several singers would have at least one copy. They sang without organ or piano accompaniment; choir leaders used a tuning fork. Most churches were small and could not be critical with the performance. They were satisfied that by having a choir their young people were happily occupied.

Of course, all songs were in German, some of them brought along from Russia by lovers of music. Here and there copies of *Liederperlen* were discovered. These songs were sung with more gusto than refinement. Songs like "*In dem Himmel ist's wunderschön*," "*Dich will ich, O Jehovah, loben*," and "*Der Friedensfürst*" evoked profound nostalgia.

Successful leaders were soon inundated with requests for copies of their songs. Franz C. Thiessen, engaged by the Conference to promote youth work, also did much to help choirs as he visited the different churches during 1937-39. He realized the great need of the choirs and urged that something be done to rectify the lamentable shortage of songs and to raise the quality of

singing. He was a highly recognized choir director, who had begun a *Liebhaverchoir* (choir of lovers of song) in Winnipeg, which sang selections like "Das Lied von der Glocke" and Mendelssohn's oratorio "St. Paul." He wrote and lectured on music.

Thiessen had a highly idealistic concept of singing. Singers were participating in the building of the Kingdom of God, he said. A choir was to be part of the church in worship and should not consider itself a separate entity. Each singer must prayerfully do God's work for His glory. "The choir sings first of all for the sake of the words of the song and not merely for its melody."¹⁴

The first choir directors' conference was called in 1942. Ben Horsch, F.C. Thiessen, and K.H. Neufeld were the resource men. In the fall of 1944 the first choir leaders' course was offered. The Conference elected the first "Song Committee" in 1945. This committee mimeographed songs for the choirs and organized weekend courses for singers and conductors. Ben Horsch, a very successful choir leader of the North End Church, who later became music professor at the MBBC, was asked to conduct the singing and choir leaders' courses. So effective was his teaching, and his enthusiasm so contagious that choir singing improved remarkably. His services to inspire choirs across Canada were soon also requested by the Canadian Conference. Dietrich Friesen from the North Kildonan Church began to substitute for him occasionally, because Horsch could not possibly do all the work alone. Later Friesen took over completely and was the resource person from 1947-51. Friesen was an accomplished singer and eventually became music professor at Pacific College in Fresno. Others who were called to lecture in music were Herbert C. Richert from Tabor College, John Boldt from Winkler Bible Institute, Jacob K. Schroeder, Cornelius D. Toews, Cornelius Balzer, and Peter Klassen.

Saengerfeste were held annually for a few years and were events to which all people flocked. Usually individual choirs would perform and also sing in mass choirs. Cornelius H. Neufeld, a Winkler conductor of the male choir and string orchestra, was a great organizer of such festivals. He was also the organizer of the Southern Manitoba Music Festivals which for years gave all school choirs, individual musicians, and singers the opportunity to perform publicly in competition.

All this improved singing in Manitoba greatly and encouraged many young people to sing and play instruments. More and more musically talented and trained young people took over the choirs, and there was often the ambition to emulate the best of them. This situation gave rise to discussion among ministers and lay people about rivalry and the desire to sing as artistically as possible. Art became the goal of a few. The words of the song were not stressed as much as singing the melody with refinement. Of course, people enjoyed beautiful singing and they encouraged attempts at improving singing, but the goal of a church choir was to glorify God and touch the hearts of people to worship. To emphasize the importance of words over music, Bible expositor, A.H. Unruh, at a Bible conference at the North End Church, pointed to the piano and stated, "*Der Kasten da hat noch keine Seele*

zu Gott gefuehrt" (That box over there has not yet led a soul to God). It was a case of the pendulum swinging from one extreme to the other, and it took agonized debate to find the proper balance "to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."

The music committees continued to assist in arranging week-long rehearsals, conducting workshops, or district song festivals. An ever present problem for the conductors was finding suitable music for worship services. One committee established a resource library of church music, through which conductors could browse and order what they found valuable. This library was later expanded to contain cantatas and oratorios. In the beginning choir music was mostly German, but this eventually changed.

Another attempt to inform conductors of good music was to ask them to write down twelve anthems they had used successfully. The committee listed all of them and made the list available to the choirs. To encourage churches to learn new hymns one committee introduced "Hymn-of-the-Month."

In the 60s and 70s the Christian Education Conferences also included church choir sessions. There were workshops for Sunday school, youth and music. The music committee arranged for its workshops as well as for the singing at their meetings together.

The world-wide music revolution profoundly influenced the singing of church young people. The first reaction to popular music was negative. Parents were warned to exercise kind control over the type of music their children listened to in order not to spoil their appreciation of good music. "The present rock and roll idiom has a very strong secular flavour which lends itself poorly for use in a church service."¹⁵ The committee at that time tried to discover new ways of using music effectively without losing the benefits of the traditional ones. Said Alan Janzen, "We shall encourage each other to regard the office of the singer with sacred esteem."¹⁶ Every year each new committee expressed caution to control the use of extreme contemporary music. Said John C. Klassen, "More effort is needed to teach our young people to discern between wholesome and unwholesome contemporary idioms."¹⁷ And Roland Sawatzky, "We need to encourage each other to use the noblest God has given us."¹⁸

Today the young people in MB churches almost invariably sing contemporary music and the older folks quietly tolerate it so as not to alienate them. The admirable part of much of contemporary music is that it uses Bible words, and that many a young person creates his/her own music.

C. Youth Work

By 1936 public concerns were expressed that the Jugendverein, although excellent in itself, was not enough to occupy the restless young people. More should be offered them and more should be expected of them. Individual churches, particularly the large Winnipeg church (consisting of three branches: North End, South End, North Kildonan) were experimenting with additional activities, such as Bible study, discussion of youth problems, and

singing groups for services in hospitals, senior citizens homes, and so on.

The Conference believed that churches, that is to say, youth leaders, needed instruction and inspiration to expand their youth ministries. The 1936 convention elected Franz C. Thiessen of Winnipeg to visit the churches and to urge the youth committees to try new ways of interesting youth in church activities. Thiessen was engaged for three months. It was a formidable task to induce busy youth leaders to begin new programs. Again the following year the Conference felt an urgency to make youth work more effective and asked Thiessen to take another three months and elected a committee (A.H. Unruh, A.A. Kroeker) to plan how to meet the requirements of youth.

After some discussion the committee concluded that to make youth more responsive to spiritual things they needed deeper biblical knowledge, and, to make them more committed, to have them participate in work within the church and out of it. Biblical training should be started at an early age and, therefore, they said, the home, Sunday school and youth worker should cooperate.

It is one thing to be able to analyze a situation, but quite another to rectify it. Insufficiently prepared youth leaders could not cope with the requirements of youth; and during that time, the aftermath of the depression, families were struggling to improve their standard of living.

By now immigrant families had had their home in Canada for ten to fifteen years, and their children had absorbed much of the country's culture. Suddenly, during the Second World War, the problems of youth glaringly revealed home weaknesses and the church's "sins of omission." At the 1944 convention fears and complaints painted a gloomy picture of youth conditions. Henry F. Klassen of the Youth Committee trenchantly summarized: "A number of our youth are entering active military service; others deny their allegiance to their Mennonite heritage; some leave church and fellowship and disown their mother tongue; a few enter into mixed marriages, and yield to false teachings; and a number of young people are lonely in faraway schools, universities, or places of work. Our growing generation is demoralized by the influence of schools, radio and daily papers."

He continued with an impassioned appeal: "Our children must imbibe the will of God from their infancy, 'with mother's milk'. They must be inoculated with the example of parents to accept our principles, our high biblical ideals of repentance, regeneration, baptism, life of faith, nonresistance, faithfulness, and honesty. If we cannot persuade our children that our interpretation of biblical knowledge is correct, we should not be surprised that they are impressed and attracted by everything alien and new, that their own inheritance seems inferior in comparison, and that they are ashamed of it."¹⁹ (See Appendix: "*Statistik der Jugend und Jugendarbeit in the M.B.G. Manitobas*").

Prodigious collective efforts were made the next few years to occupy and stimulate youth. Annual youth festivals were held in all five districts with themes like "The Power of Influence," "The Church of Jesus Christ," "Spiritual Life of the Growing Young Person," "Equipping the Youth

Worker," "A Model SS Lesson for the Young Men's Class," and so on. In 1956 these festivals were held in seven areas simultaneously with two ministers serving each.

Resource material was being written and printed. J.M. Elias of Winkler had been collecting youth endeavour material for years, and a selection of it was printed and made available to all.²⁰ Heinrich Regehr wrote eight dialogues (*Gespraechen*) which also were published.²¹ F.C. Thiessen, upon the urging of the Canadian S.S. Conference,²² issued *Knospen und Blueten*. The Winkler Bible Institute also in its school publication *Der Jugendarbeiter* supplied material for youth work. The editor of *Die Rundschau*, Henry F. Klassen, started the Manitoba *Konferenz-Jugendblatt* in 1944 to foster youth work but also to encourage greater unity in church activities.²³ A little booklet "The Christian in Relationship to the Commercial Movies and Amusements" was written by F.C. Peters and David H. Neumann. All churches were urged to make use of that material.

Young people were encouraged to contribute to youth projects like bursaries for South American students to study at WBI or MBBC, a car for a missionary, a generator for the mission school in Congo (Zaire), and donations for the Gospel Light Hour, and Bible camps (Arnes, Burwalde, Clear Lake). Thousands of dollars were thus collected by the young people of Manitoba.²⁴ After a few years of such projects it was considered wise to offer smaller undertakings which individual groups could work on with greater enthusiasm and pride. Even more money was gathered this way.

Now the reports occasionally revealed satisfaction with the progress of youth work. Several good suggestions were given churches to improve their youth activities: young married couples should be responsible for youth work, and not only an older man of the church; the young people should get together often enough to establish a group identity; and, since youth grows more independent of parents, and looks to peers, emulating them, the church had the moral obligation to provide mature leadership.

But the note of satisfaction soon gave way to the former anxieties. It was the time of the youth revolution, hippies, Jesus People, the drug counterculture, a preoccupation with the occult, and radical changes in music. Church youth too, were influenced. Radio, television, and easy transportation made all aspects of the general youth revolution available to them. Wrote Harold Jantz, "The church and its youth are under every imaginable trial today, but God is at work . . . We want to encourage one another not to be overly protective of our youth. We will not save our youth by trying to set high walls around them. The world is too close for that. Our only defense is to enter the conflict with them and in the power of Christ face the forces of the evil one."²⁵ The remarkable fact that so few were actually lost to the movements is astounding and humbling. Truly, God was at work, and few young people succumbed to drugs or to the occult religions. The Jesus movement produced outstanding witnesses, and rock music acquired religious overtones.

To be sure, the older generation found it hard to excuse the revolutionary changes and accept youth criticism of time-honored ways. But gradually the

blatant revolt against anything traditional subsided. Church attitudes also have changed. Youth have become more self-reliant, more courageous in witnessing, more willing to be part of the body of Christ, more cooperative in building the Kingdom of God.

D. University Student Services

In 1956 the two-year-old Association of Mennonite University Students (AMUS) had its first opportunity to report its activities to the MB convention.²⁶ Two students, J. Dirks and R.A. Klassen, informed the delegates (in German) of the reasons for organizing, and the association's aims. They wanted the delegation to know of the spiritual life and the witness of the Mennonite Brethren students on campus. "Indeed," they said, "the university is not only a place to study, but also a mission field." They told of prayer and Bible study meetings together with IVCF, and the planning of campus-wide evangelism.

To stress and preserve Mennonite distinctives AMUS was organized by students affiliated with all the different Mennonite denominations. AMUS already had held two conferences to which they invited speakers on the topic of nonresistance. At the last conference a special "AMUS Placement Service" committee had been elected to list the Mennonite university students and make this list available to all Mennonite organizations and administrative bodies which could use the services of graduates. At the same time this committee intended to acquire names and addresses of Mennonite organizations and institutions and make these available to students in order to facilitate short-term or long-term Christian service.

The reason for bringing this to the attention of the delegation was to ask for advice, and intercession, and "to feel united with you in the years when intensive secular studies occupy our energy so much that we often become isolated."²⁷

The convention of 1956 expressed its joy that students strove to remain in contact with the church, assured them of the "brotherly goodwill of the Conference" in their efforts to nurture their Christian faith, and wished them God's blessing.²⁸ Beyond that nothing was attempted.

For the next ten years no reports of student activities were heard.

As an ever greater number of Mennonite Brethren young people attended the universities of the province and other secular schools, and as a concern for their spiritual well-being was voiced again and again by parents and especially by country churches, the Committee of Reference and Counsel in 1965 asked Victor Adrian, John A. Toews, and John Wall "to explore the possibility of starting a student service."²⁹ This preliminary step became a recommendation to the convention with the proviso to add one more member to the committee. The convention sanctioned the appointment of the three brethren and elected one more, Jake Suderman.

That year only exploratory work was done. The committee consulted with MB professors, representatives of the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, and

with students and pastors. In a letter to all pastors and youth leaders the committee explained the ramifications of the project and its implementation. The needs of students varied, and there was always the danger of duplication of existing services. The letter described a few of the difficulties students had. They are at the age, the letter stated, where they adopt a definite set of values, formulate an approach to life, choose a career and a life partner, and seriously question the plausibility of their inherited religious principles. Most students go through intense struggles and conflicts as they wrestle with these issues. Some "retreat from Christianity"; some criticize the church for not taking a clear stance on moral issues or for taking an outdated position in a modern world. Some want to communicate better with the church, for in spite of their questions they are loyal. Students must move beyond childhood religious experiences into a conscious and dynamic commitment, the committee suggested, before they go out to study in order to successfully face the intellectual environment of a university.³⁰

The letter also suggested that pastors and youth leaders, in their preaching, teaching, and counselling, concentrate on the example of Christ, urging young people to be followers of Christ rather than a religion. They should assist parents to communicate wisely with their teenagers, create loyalty to the church through participation in its activities, entrust them with opportunities to witness, and make good reading material available to them.

A year later a committee was elected and David Loewen of Camp Arnes was engaged on a half-time basis to contact students on the campus and counsel when advisable. In 1969, three students were added to the committee.³¹

Since the committee was elected annually, it lacked continuity. The new members always had to be informed of their duties. Since the students who were elected did not usually attend conventions, it was difficult for them to know the purpose of such a committee. Much experimentation was the result, with the committee growing in number of members and then being reduced again. At last in 1970 the Student Services Committee received standing status. For several years Vern Ratzlaff was the coordinator on a quarter-time basis³² and later John Dyck,³³ and then Ken Reddig.³⁴ They tried to contact students individually or in groups, and had Bible studies or sharing sessions. Often special speakers were invited to serve. In 1971 exploratory meetings with several Mennonite denominations resulted in the establishment of Inter-Mennonite Campus Ministry which included MB, GC, EMB, and EMMC students.³⁵ This committee became very active and usually provided two lectures by prominent Mennonite scholars from U.S.A. or Canada.

Because the IVCF was offering many of the services the MB committee had tried, and because many MB students regularly attended its meetings and often became leaders in the fellowship, the committee's work was reduced to making a yearly list of students and their addresses, offering them a subsidized subscription to HIS magazine, a free FORUM, and assistance to students who desired to attend URBANA or the Canadian Youth Rally at Banff. The conference annually supported IVCF with \$2,000.³⁶

Since IMCM arranged for lectures and IVCF offered the devotional em-

phasis the Student Services Committee is now reduced to two members, elected for a two-year term.

In 1981, in order to reach more students, the committee combined its efforts with the College and Career groups of the Mennonite Brethren churches of Winnipeg.³⁷ Each month one such group was host for a meeting at which discussions were held on topics relevant to young men and women. The success of the procedure created a change in the constitution. From 1982 the committee was called "College and Career Service Committee."³⁸ In spite of all these efforts "a significant number (of students) manage to slip between the cracks and do not plug into any Christian group."³⁹ But the committee's aim still is "to provide a link between the MB Church and the MB students in such a way as to encourage students to grow in their faith."⁴⁰

NOTES Chapter 14

1. *Minutes*. Winkler Mennonite Brethren Church, 1919.

2. A.H. Unruh taught Sunday School lessons according to a "psychologischer Stufengang" (a psychological sequence of steps). It consisted of

Vorbesprechung (a review of the previous lesson and explanation of words in the new lesson)

Zielangabe (aim of the new lesson stated)

Darbietung (presentation of the lesson)

Vertiefung (evaluation of the lesson)

Anwendung (practical application and memory verse)

All his students, for years to follow, used this very effective method in their SS teaching.

3. Children, after the first year or two in public school, conversed in English exclusively. Often on a Sunday morning in church one could hear them ask each other "Did you do your *Lektion*?" They pronounced the German word *Lektion*, "lexin."

4. Estimate by Abe Reimer, Manitoba Conference Education chairman 1975-77.

5. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1943.

6. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1979, p. 72.

7. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1962.

8. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1975, p. 116.

9. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1982, p. 85.

10. *Minutes*. Winkler Church, July 23, 1904.

11. Klippenstein L. and Toews, J. G. *Mennonite Memories*. (Winnipeg, MB: Centennial Publications, 1977), p. 301.

12. Brown, Frank. *Mennonite Brethren Church, Winkler MB, 1888-1963, 75th Anniversary Book*. (Altona, MB: D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1963) p. 27.

13. *Minutes*. Winkler Church, 1912.

14. Thiessen, F. C. *Konferenz-Jugendblatt* #2. Sept. 1944.

15. Klassen, Peter. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1972, p. 59.

16. Janzen, Alan. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1966, p. 48.

17. Klassen, John C. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1974, p. 70.
18. Sawatzky, Roland. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1975, p. 117.
19. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1944, p. 23.
20. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1949.
21. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1954.
22. "Knospen und Blueten" (Buds and Blossoms). A collection of poems and dialogues for Sunday School and Youth Work.
23. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1945.
24. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1956, p. 54.
25. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1970, pp. 123, 124.
26. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1956, p. 78.
27. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1956, p. 79.
28. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1956, p. 75.
29. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1966, p. 95.
30. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1968, p. 35.
31. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1969, p. 41.
32. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1970, p. 113.
33. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1976, p. 83.
34. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1977, p. 58.
35. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1971, p. 77.
36. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1978, p. 114.
37. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1981, p. 81.
38. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1982, p. 81.
39. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1978, p. 82.
40. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1981. p. 8.

Chapter 15

EDUCATIONAL EFFORTS

A. Bible Schools

PENIEL - The Winkler Bible Institute

The founder of the Winkler Bible School was Abram H. Unruh. He had been a teacher at the Bible School in Tschangraw, Crimea, Russia. This school was closed by order of the Soviet government in 1924. That same year, Unruh, together with his family, immigrated to Manitoba. At that time immigrants usually began work on farms, but Unruh was a teacher and he was looking for an opportunity to teach. He taught German at the Collegiate in Winkler, in the meantime exploring the possibility of beginning a Bible

School. He found enthusiastic support from Jacob A. Kroeker, Abram A. Kroeker, John B. Dyck and a few others, all Canadian and well-established financially. Spiritually the Winkler MB congregation was ready for a venture like that.¹

An unpretentious beginning was made in the fall of 1925 with eleven students and A.H. Unruh as teacher. Most of the students were children of the major supporters. The first class was conducted in a rented room of a private home. Before Christmas another of the Tschangraw teachers, Gerhard J. Reimer, arrived in Winkler. He was added to the staff in the new year.

An impressive list of courses, all in German, was offered the first year:

Bibelkunde (Bible knowledge), *Glaubenslehre* (Doctrine), *Seelenlehre* (Psychology), *Sprachlehre* (Language, grammar), O.T.



A. H. Unruh

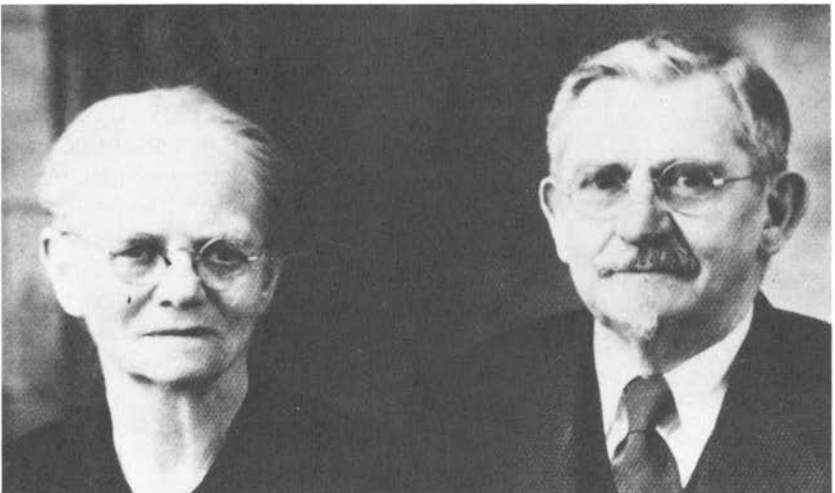
Exegese (Old Testament Exegesis), *N.T. Exegeses* (New Testament Exegesis), *Stilistic* (theory of style, the writing of essays), *Ethik* (Ethics), *Alter-*



Mr. and Mrs. Jacob A. Kroeker

tumskunde (Archaeology), *Kirchengeschichte* (Church History), *Sonntagschularbeit* (Sunday School methods), *Lehre von der Predigt* (Homiletics), *Naturgeschichte* (Natural History), *Gesang* (Singing).²

After Christmas the school's enrollment doubled. By the beginning of the second year, 1926, there were three teachers, with Johann G. Wiens, the former principal of the Tschangraw Bible School, having arrived in Winkler. Wiens had been a missionary in India after studies in Hamburg and England.



Mr. and Mrs. Johann G. Wiens

Because of the illness of his daughter, the family returned to Russia. World War I prevented him from returning to India. He then began the Bible School in Tschangraw and called A.H. Unruh and G.J. Reimer to assist him.

It seemed now as if the Tschangraw Bible School had transferred to Winkler, with only the position of the principal changed. The curriculum and the teaching methods were definitely European. At that time there was little criticism of these emphases. Actually they suited the Mennonite immigrants of the 1920s very well, and the Canadian Mennonites accepted them unquestioningly.³

The rapid increase in student enrollment may be ascribed not only to the popularity of A.H. Unruh and his colleagues, but also to the fact that many students were young men who lived on farms and were expendable during the winter months. Bible School instruction was for five months, from late October to early March. Many of the students were immigrants who could not as yet speak English, and were too old to go to public schools, but who, nevertheless, eagerly desired further education. Students were, in general, mature men and women; some of them were married.

The school generally enjoyed the support of the churches. The assistance of the Winkler MB Church and its good relationship with the school was exemplary. There was no organization that owned the school; rather, the faculty, together with a few prominent Winkler businessmen, formed the executive which administered the school, and teachers were responsible for collecting money to defray expenses. A.H. Unruh preached in many churches and at such times also informed the congregations of the school's needs. Teachers went out singly or in pairs to farms and solicited support. When it was necessary to build a facility, enlarge it, or make repairs the Winkler businessmen would arrange these.

A.H. Unruh was the "heart and soul" of the entire undertaking. Although he was not a practical business man, he chaired all meetings of the executive. The *Lehrerkollegium* (the faculty) was in charge of the school. Tuition did not nearly cover expenses, and the teachers received remuneration only as money was available. At the end of a school year, after all expenses were settled, the teachers divided what was left over. Invariably that was very little.

As in every new venture which requires the support of many, there are those who hold back or detract from its success. Some people resented that the Bible school received much recognition, and that the teachers acquired leadership positions. The strained relationship between the *Russlaender* and *Kanadier*, which existed since the 1920s immigration, was transferred to the school. Fortunately there were wise, level-headed people on both sides who were able to calm ruffled tempers. One of these was John Warkentin, leader of the Winkler MB Church, who eased many tense situations with his mild and unprejudiced manner.

Not only Mennonite Brethren supported the school. The minister of the Bergthaler Church, Jacob Heppner, publicly demonstrated his approval and a few Bergthaler Church members attended.⁴ Two years after the beginning of the Bible school (1927) a number of students asked for an extended program

of studies. A four-year program was introduced and continued until 1960. Again, because some students were preparing for the ministry and WBI being the only school teaching in German, a fifth year of studies was added in 1933. This class continued until 1944, but had never more than ten students.

The curriculum changed with the times. English language became a requisite subject and Christian service courses were added. The Sunday school course became a two-year program. Music courses were expanded to include directing of choirs.

In 1961 a three-year program was adopted. It lasted only seven years. From 1968 on, WBI has a two-year program. Experimentally, a third year was added in 1978 in order to offer a BRE degree. Because of low enrollment and the extra expense, this was dropped again.

In 1932 the Bible School joined the Evangelical Teacher Training Association (ETTA). These courses were later replaced by the program of the MB Christian Education Board of the Canadian MB Conference. Credits were obtained by students first from ETTA and later from the Christian Education office at Clearbrook.⁵

Economic and social changes occasionally brought the school into troubled times. The first major crisis came when the Canadian MB Conference decided to establish *eine hoehere Bibelschule* (a theological college). The conference called A.H. Unruh to the position of president of the new school. When he accepted, the other Bible school teachers resigned. The general conviction was that a Bible College in Winnipeg would mean the demise of the Winkler Bible School. Students would prefer a Bible College offering degrees to a Bible School that could not do so.⁶ Yet the directors and teachers of the Bible school still believed there was a need for Bible instruction on a lower level, but feared they would face acute financial shortages. The Bible College, they felt, would acquire most of the support.

The school's continued existence was uncertain. Would it open for another year or not? One hope was left: if the Manitoba MB Conference took responsibility for the Winkler school, it could carry on.

During the fall session of the Manitoba Conference the former *Lehrerkollegium* met separately to draft a document to transfer the school to the Conference. This was presented to the Conference on October 7, 1944 with the request "that also in the future this enterprise will be directed with the motto of the Bible School 'I will not let thee go, except thou bless me'." The Conference unanimously accepted the proposal and elected a board of nine ministers. The new board asked the teachers to resume their former positions, except for J.G. Wiens, who became the principal. They accepted. When the Conference acquired the Bible School it received the assets of the Bible School; that is, the school building, inventory, and the bank account (which amounted to five cents!).⁷

Immediately the news went out that the school would open for instruction again. Because of the lengthy uncertainty the enrollment was reduced. Although this period was one of struggle for survival, the 1940s and beyond proved that the Bible School still had an important place in the minds and

hearts of the people. Of course, with time, the teachers changed, but the spirit of the original Bible school remained for a long time.

Another crisis of survival occurred during the late 50s and 60s. World War II had created high employment, and young men and women could easily find remunerative work. About this time, too, farmers began to mechanize their agricultural operations and fewer people were required to run the farms. This resulted in a drift of young people to the city as well as to higher secular education. Fewer and fewer young people chose Bible instruction, which was not likely to improve their financial prospects. The Bible school responded by reducing their course to three years, but still, the enrollment declined steadily. Could the school survive in a world of secularism and growing educational requirements?

The conference looked for reasons for the decline in numbers. It laid the blame upon the school rather than in external circumstances. The Ontario Conference, which had supported the school, withdrew and expressed its criticism: lack of discipline, immature staff, poor Christian fellowship. And many in Manitoba agreed.

H.H. Redekopp, principal 1948-56), tried to explain: "Today's young people are not like those of twenty years ago. This is a new generation with the various views of this American continent: views which often are dangerous for family, church and personal life. On this continent today our young people are educated by public schools, radio, magazines and newspapers. These things determine personality, disrupt family life, and often attack the church. Negative influences often gain a footing through worldly literature."⁸

The teachers themselves seemed irresolute how to overcome the difficulties. One of them wrote to the school executive, "I am not sure that we as a faculty are clear in our thinking as to the real purpose of the WBI . . . Does Christian education still have a place and does it fulfill a real need in our conference ministry or must it always be considered as something that is second-rate, second-best to the secular, as the intimation so often has been?"⁹ All across Canada at that time, the question was debated — Can Bible schools survive?

This debilitating reality became a problem for the Conference, for low enrollment meant a greater financial burden. To aggravate a critical situation, there was confrontation over "what it meant to educate at a post-high school level today." In 1967 the WBI prepared a paper on "The Christian View of Education." The following methods of education were proposed:

1. A search for the truth through open dialogue between students and teachers.
2. A positive regard of and trust in one another.
3. A critical examination of contemporary thinking.
4. Translation of ethical principles set forth by Scripture into life situations, with tolerance and love toward those who differ from the majority in peripheral areas.
5. Initiating commitment and decision-making in keeping with the fun-

damental demands of Scripture.¹⁰

These principles caused censorious discussions. Eventually three teachers and four members of the school Board resigned.

A principal and three teachers were engaged. The new principal, Henry R. Baerg, was given definite directives: student enrollment must go up and the Conference subsidy must come down. During the nine years of his administration (1969-78) Baerg certainly accomplished that. Student enrollment grew to the highest in the school's history and, in spite of extensive building programs, the campus was debt free.¹¹

Building Program

During A.H. Unruh's term as principal of the Bible school, its thorough teaching, high academic standard, and the disciplined study required from students enhanced its reputation and students from all over Canada, wherever Mennonites lived, came to study. This increase and the desire to have an efficient campus necessitated intermittent building. The first building was erected on Eighth Street in Winkler in 1926 and enlarged in 1933. Five years later it was doubled in size. This building was used by the school for twenty-six years.¹²

Other needs were accommodations for men and women. The Hooge Home was purchased in 1945 for men and the Penner Home in 1946 for the girls. West Hall was bought in 1952.¹³

For many years a Bible School campus was planned. Land lots were purchased. In 1964 a new campus became a reality with an administration building, housing the classrooms, and a girl's dormitory. The men's dormitory was erected in 1967. The Kronsart MB Church, after its services were discontinued, was donated to the school, moved to the campus and remodelled into a chapel and library.¹⁴

In 1975 — the fiftieth anniversary — a memorial expansion project was approved by the Conference. Former students, scattered across Canada, were approached for contributions. A fine gymnasium was erected.¹⁵

The latest building project was begun in 1983 — a dining hall and kitchen facilities.¹⁶

Today the school has all the conveniences and requirements of a modern Bible institute campus.

Philosophy of the Winkler Bible School

In the beginning the Bible School was named "Peniel" (the Face of God). The school's goal was to search the "Face of God," that is, to lead students into God's Word and translate it into their daily lives. The school also tried to meet the needs of students who wanted to prepare for public ministry or those who simply desired an enrichment of their spiritual service.

The Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith constituted the fundamental basis of the school. With slight changes and a few additions it has remained the foundation upon which the school rests. The Bible, considered to be verbally inspired and "the final authority for faith and life,"¹⁷ continues to be the

central textbook.

The school's purpose and philosophy has undergone repeated revisions because of changing times and needs. But the basic aim, stated in 1928 has not changed: "The general purpose of the Bible School is to lead men and women into the Holy Scriptures to assist them in making God's Word effective in their lives."

In 1950 the following was added, "to foster an expressional program to help students pass on to others the truth of God," particularly through Sunday school teaching.

In 1967 the Education Board prepared a lengthy paper on "The Christian View of Education." "Real education," it stated, "is the process of making known and learning what God's truth is"¹⁸ and must ground the faith of students rather than lead them around intellectual theories "that strike at the heart of Christian faith." This must be accomplished by an intensive study of the Word and a translation of the Word into practical life, that is, the integration of the spiritual, intellectual, physical and social aspects of man. (See Appendix).

In 1975, when the Bible school introduced the two-year program, the objectives were directed toward making the Bible a guide for life in a secular world, encouraging commitment to Christ, fostering a spirit of wholesome enquiry, and impressing the student with a deep sense of his mission in personal soul winning.¹⁹

Influence of the School

The school's influence was quickly felt in the churches. Sunday school was taught according to A.H. Unruh's Christian Education course. Methods were European, psychologically sound, and appropriate in the 1920s. Graduates would often become Sunday school superintendents and would teach other teachers. A number of these superintendents met regularly with their teachers to review in detail the next Sunday's lesson, discuss methods, and the verse to be memorized. Often one of the teachers would have to teach a *Probelektion* (a demonstration lesson) with other teachers as pupils. Unruh's interest in child psychology was transferred to many of his students.

When Abram A. Kroecker joined the faculty in 1929 a subtle change of emphasis was noticeable. American pedagogical and psychological books appeared on the shelves and in 1932 the school became a member of ETTA. Through the efforts of the Canadian Education Board these courses were introduced in all MB churches. Later the Bible School was also responsible for initiating the "One-week Sunday School Courses" for teachers who did not have the opportunity to attend regular classes. Bible School teachers would go to churches that invited them, and teach Sunday school teachers for a week or a weekend. These courses were purposely conducted as practical as possible, with demonstration, practice lessons and constructive criticism. These courses were very useful.²⁰

Many ordained ministers had never had the opportunity of attending a Bible school. The Bible School began short-term *Predigerkurse* (courses for

ministers) for them. Ministers from all over Manitoba, and sometimes beyond, would travel to Winkler for a few days of intensive Bible instruction and inspiration. Much emphasis was placed on the "how" of preaching. These courses were carried on until the Bible College took over responsibility for them.²¹

Another first for the Bible school were the missionary conferences. Missions, both foreign and home, was constantly emphasized in the school, just as it had been in the Winkler MB Church, especially in later years with H.S. Voth as leader. With the help of the teachers, the students organized the "Africa Mission Society" in 1933 to support Henry G. Bartsch in his work in Africa and later Hermann Lenzmann and Margaret Siemens. Yearly conferences in which missionaries and mission-minded ministers spoke, stirred the people to greater efforts for missions.²²

Students were urged to participate in practical service. This consisted of hospital visitation, tract distribution, preaching in the nearby villages, singing, evangelism. Wherever there were opportunities the students served willingly and enthusiastically. The Winkler MB Church made ample use of the students in its church programs, particularly in the *Jugendverein* where various singing groups and young men, delivering sermonettes, were put to work.²³

For a few years a radio program over CFAM was conducted by the Bible school under the direction of H. Lenzmann.²⁴

There is no doubt that the Bible school exerted great influence on the music of the Manitoba churches and beyond. It fostered good singing and music in general, and its choirs and singing groups visited the churches, inspiring singers and conductors to emulate a high standard of music. Teachers like Ben Horsch, John Boldt, Peter Koslowsky and others helped greatly to raise the standard of singing, not only in school but also in the churches.²⁵

Several publications were attempted to promote the school, to keep in contact with graduates, as well as to fill a vacuum in contemporary theological teaching. These papers found their way to all corners of Canada. There was first *Die Antwort* (The Answer) with A.H. Unruh as editor. "This periodical is for the purpose of uniting and encouraging all believers in the Kingdom of God, and to support the individual follower of Christ in his spiritual struggles . . . It is to lead the readers into the Scriptures as well as into Christian fellowship and service." This monthly paper continued for twenty months.

Die Antwort was succeeded by *Der Jugendarbeiter* (The Youth Worker) a monthly paper prepared by the students, with Abram H. Redekop as editor. It ran for three years. An official organ of the school was *Der Morgenstern* (The Morning Star) with Henry H. Redekopp as editor, it was distributed free to the churches. Published during 1945-50, the Quarterly News went through several alterations until it became what it is today, a Bible School and Alumni Association organ.²⁶

Perhaps the greatest influence of the Bible school upon the unchurched community was the Daily Vacation Bible Schools. For more than two decades students taught DVBS in public schools south, east, west, and north

of Winkler. "Many children made a decision for Christ and many others were helped to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."²⁷

Another venture of the Bible school was the Winkler Bible Camp. Because few children from the Winkler area could make use of other camps, teachers H.H. Redekopp and G.D. Pries planned a camp close to Winkler. In 1949, with the enthusiastic support of the teachers, students, and community, the first building was erected on a site in Burwalde. By 1952 there were five buildings and the camp program was in full swing. At the twenty-fifth anniversary of the camp the following report was made: "The camp serves over 400 children and young people each summer with an active camping program and a regular presentation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ."²⁸

Many of the ministers of Mennonite Brethren churches in Canada received their Bible training in Winkler; through their influence many other young people in turn studied at the school. No statistics are available on the number of ministers attending WBI at one time or another, but at the fiftieth anniversary gathering there were 107. Missionaries who attended WBI: sixteen in Africa, eight in India, two in Europe, two in Japan, one in the Philippines, one in Brazil, seven in Colombia, two in Paraguay, one in Trinidad, and one in Costa Rica. By 1975 there were thirty-nine Christian service workers, eighteen home mission workers, and forty with MCC.²⁹

Steinbach Bible School

The Bible School in Steinbach was begun by two ministers, Jacob W. Reimer and Henry F. Fast in 1931. The three month course was held in one of the local churches. The school was discontinued after two winters because of the small enrollment and half-hearted support.

In 1936 seven Mennonite Brethren men revived the interest in a Bible school. After much prayer and planning two teachers, John Guenther and John G. Baerg, were engaged; classes were held in the MB Church. After several years the school expanded to three classes. The principal, John G. Baerg, was a graduate of the Winkler Bible School, so the curriculum of that institute was adopted. Baerg served as principal for eight years.

The school was conducted for five months each winter, October to March. Tuition was four dollars per month. The goals of the school were:

- to lead students into a better understanding of the Word of God
- to establish them in the faith
- to prepare them for the Lord's service
- to prepare Sunday school teachers

Much emphasis was laid upon this last goal. A further aim of the school was to serve the entire Mennonite community of the East Reserve. As more and more students of other Mennonite churches attended, an association of the various local churches was organized in 1938, so that all would be represented on the administrative board.³⁰

As economic conditions improved, more and more MB students chose to attend the Winkler Bible School. Eventually the Steinbach MB Church

withdrew from the school association. The school eventually became the present-day Steinbach Bible College, supported by several evangelical Mennonite churches.

Bible School in Winnipeg

Rev. Abram B. Peters, a man with extensive biblical knowledge and love for the Lord and people, who was active in the Winnipeg City Mission, began an evening Bible school for young women working in the city. He conducted classes every Thursday evening. Rev. Frank C. Thiessen assisted for some time.

Thursday was the day when the young women employed in housework had a free afternoon and evening. The classes ran from 6 - 8 p.m., and the students could then attend the Tabernacle meetings, beginning at 8 p.m. Tabernacle Verein was a church organization offering spiritual inspiration to these working women. A.B. Peters also lectured on biblical topics at these gatherings. He continued this service for twelve years.³¹

B. Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute

Rationale and Beginning

The Mennonites in Russia had a highly developed education system. They had their own teachers, supervision, and curriculum, in which the German language and religion had highest priority. In Manitoba, they had no control over schools. In country schools, of course, which often had Mennonite teachers, religion and the German language could be taught at certain specified times. This was not possible in the cities and towns, however.

Mennonite immigrant parents, raised under the rigid discipline of European schools, did not approve of the laxity in Manitoba city schools. Their children spent five hours every school day under the influence of teachers and fellow students of a different culture and religion, and they noted with apprehension the gradual changes in the thinking of their children. The resultant culture clash in their own homes concerned them deeply. These Mennonite parents were further alarmed over the ruling, during the last years of World War II, that all high school students must participate in military drills.

In expressing their fears to each other, a deep desire to offer their children an education that would help them become useful Christian men and women who would value their Mennonite heritage, grew among these parents. Under the enthusiastic and influential leadership of Cornelius C. Warkentin a Mennonite High School Society was organized in 1945 (*Mennonitischer Hochschulverein von Manitoba*). It was a tentative organization of concerned parents and friends of Christian education for the purpose of establishing a private Christian high school. The group hoped that the churches would take responsibility for such a school. C.C. Warkentin became the society's first chairman, aided by an executive committee.

The opportunity to begin the school offered itself when the MB Bible Col-

lege had two vacant classrooms available. Negotiations between the society and the MBBC faculty resulted in permission to use the classrooms with the understanding that the school would submit to the regulations of the Bible College.

Now the society would have to get government permission to establish a private school, recruit students, engage teachers, and collect funds.

The Department of Education of Manitoba, through the influence of Inspector Andrew Moore, granted permission to establish a private school. Forty-six students were recruited, and two teachers engaged for grades X and XI. Religion would be taught by college teachers.

To collect a fund for the school was a difficult matter. Originally, only a few parents joined the Society. As always, the Mennonites were cautious about a new endeavour that might require great financial commitment. The first members of the Society, also members in the three Winnipeg MB churches, were urged to persuade their churches to voluntarily support the school. North Kildonan MB Church decided to collect for the school; the North End and South End churches took a "wait-and-see" attitude. Later all three churches wholeheartedly aided the efforts of the Society.

Although the Manitoba Conference had no obligation toward this enterprise, the spring convention of 1945 allowed Heinrich Toews of Arnaud to report the planning of a private school in Winnipeg. He stated that the school would be attached to the Bible College and that Religion and the German language would be obligatory. He also thought that the school would benefit College students who had had their studies interrupted and needed to complete their high school education. According to him, such "who take pains to walk uprightly" were to be admitted as students of the school.¹

It soon became apparent that a school in the building of another school would really be managed by the president of the host school. The high school, it seemed, had become a department of the college. The college president was, in effect, the chairman of the high school executive committee. This situation created some friction and C.C. Warkentin resigned. Also, the Canadian Conference objected to having a high school department in the Bible College.²

Because of these events, the Society was in disarray. It needed to be reorganized, and confidently take over its responsibilities rather than depending upon another organization to manage the school. A meeting was called for April 15, 1946. Fifty-seven supporters convened at the North End MB Church. They examined the constitution prepared by the executive and temporarily approved it.³ They thought to name the school "Winnipeg Mennonite Collegiate Institute." and also discussed the possibility of buying the house next to the Bible College on Talbot Avenue.

Since none of these items were decided conclusively, another meeting was called for April 29, 1946. All members were urged to advertise the meeting and recruit more members. At this meeting, 64 members attended. The constitution was not finalized, but the name of the school was changed to "Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute" and a fund (donations and loans) of

\$1,100 for purchase of the house was reported.

The purpose of the Society, according to the constitution, was to support a school taught by qualified Mennonite teachers (fully recognized by the provincial Department of Education), to offer young people a sound secular education with a Christian emphasis. Its motto was, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and its righteousness." Society members were to be Mennonites, twenty-one years or over, and would pay an annual fee of \$10.⁴

The support base for the school became more firmly established when churches joined the Society. The three Winnipeg MB churches and a few country churches joined soon after the reorganization of the Society, and by 1956 there were nine churches supporting the school.

The name of the school caused a prolonged controversy. Since the constitution stressed Mennonite Brethren principles and also provided that the board consist of MB members only, the name remained Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute. This created dissension, for many found the name exclusive, whereas the Society's membership was open to all Mennonites.

Nine directors were elected in 1946, six from Winnipeg — A.C. DeFehr, Aron Janzen, Franz Klassen, Abram Dueck, John Unruh, Jacob Wedel, and three from the country — William Dyck (Niverville), David Dyck (Newton), Henry Bergman (Glenlea).

For the next year, 1946-47, tuition was set at \$70 for Grade X, \$85 for Grade XI, and \$100 for Grade XII. Tuition alone did not keep the school financially solvent. Repeatedly members of the Society and churches had to inject extra money to keep it out of debt. Already in 1945, in its first report to the Manitoba Conference, the Society proposed that the Conference take over the school. The fact that not nearly all country churches had students at the MBCI, as well as the fear of the financial burden, argued against the proposal. Year after year the MBCI was allowed to report, but it was not until 1964 that the Conference accepted the responsibility of the school's administration.

Through the years student enrollment increased steadily, from forty-six in 1945-46 to 431 in 1982-83.⁵ In the beginning all the students were from MB homes, with about as many from the country as from Winnipeg. Gradually this proportion changed. Country schools became consolidated, offering better educational facilities, and more importantly, Mennonite teachers were readily engaged in areas populated by Mennonites. This kept students in their country schools, for many schools now upheld in all but name the ideals of Mennonite educators. Therefore, while the MBCI had initially been a boarding school for students outside Winnipeg, it gradually became a city school only.

Since the school was open to all who would comply with the regulations of the Society, students from non-MB homes were admitted. As interest in private education grew, so did the enrollment of such students. MBCI's high academic standards, its athletic successes in inter-high school competitions, its beautiful singing at the Music Festivals, and the full approval of the Department of Education made the school known province-wide. Children of

non-MB's were admitted if vacancies were available. Presently, about half the student body come from homes other than Mennonite Brethren.

Although this trend was deplored by some delegates to the conventions, most of them approved, not only because it augmented the ever-precarious income of the school, but also because it gave the MB students the benefit of relating to those of other backgrounds. Interaction in a heterogeneous student body would enrich the students, it was argued, and the Mennonite Brethren students would become more aware of their own heritage, and value it more.

As the student body increased parallel classes had to be established. Today every grade has double or triple classes.

Buildings

In 1946, a large house at 173 Talbot was purchased for \$10,500. Walls were re-arranged to create classrooms, and the upstairs rooms were used as a dormitory.

In 1947-48 four classrooms were added to the original house. In 1959 the old house was demolished and a new one with classes, office space, and gymnasium was constructed. In 1973, a remodelling of the old and a large new addition was undertaken. The school now accommodates more than 400 students. All construction was accomplished by donations from interested families.⁶

Curriculum



Current MBCI Building

The Society's intention from the very beginning was to offer the complete high school curriculum of the Manitoba Department of Education plus a German course and Religion. Today, Religion courses consist of Biblical studies,

church history (with emphasis on Mennonite history), and Christian and contemporary issues.⁷

From its very beginning the school has enjoyed the goodwill of the Department of Education and appreciative reports of the school inspectors. The 1976-77 inspector even recommended that the Grade XI and XII Bible courses, Church History, and Contemporary Issues be accredited by the Department.

In 1958, because so many children came from English-speaking families, the German language became optional. A French language course was added in 1977.

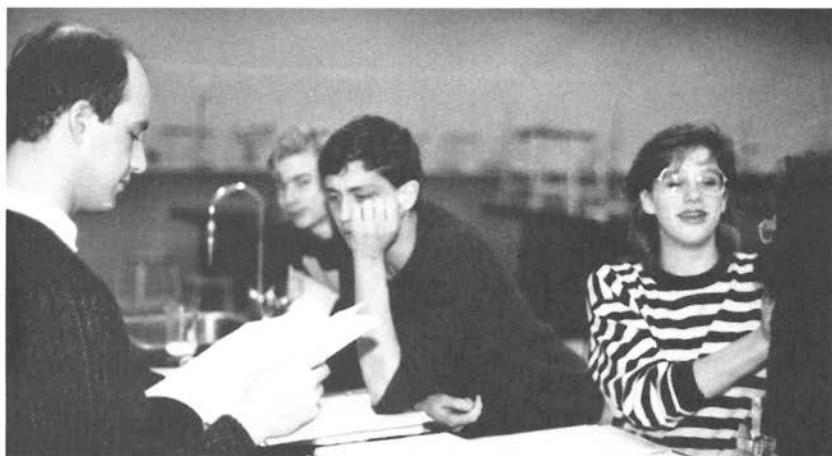
Presently MBCI receives support from the federal government for teaching French and from the Manitoba government for teaching German. The Manitoba Department of Education also supports private schools with \$430 per student.⁸

Spiritual Emphasis

While the student body was small, morning devotions were held altogether and led in turn by the teachers. Often pastors from the city and country were asked to lead a brief devotional to exemplify the solidarity of school and church.

Today, junior students and senior students have their morning devotional time separately or each class alone. A report by the principal to the convention in 1966: "The spiritual influence of our school is of prime importance. Four mornings of the week the students hear a message from the Word of God. For one period each day they receive specific instruction in matters of faith. Twice a week the students have their own prayer meetings."⁹ These prayer meetings are on a voluntary basis, and many students attend regularly.

Every year a religious emphasis week, with an invited minister who may stress evangelism, a deepening of the faith, or a greater understanding of



Teacher - Student Interaction

spiritual truths, is held.

Teachers, of course, exert the greatest influence. According to the constitution and the express wish of the founders all teachers must be sincere Christians and show evidence of loyalty to Jesus Christ. As the school enlarged and more teachers were needed, eligible teachers were sometimes hard to find. Occasionally exceptions were made in the hiring of those coaching sport activities. Invariably the brotherhood objected. Says the 1955 report of teachers: "Our aim is through instruction and example to bring the students into fellowship with God."¹⁰ The teachers' character, their faith, their way of instruction — even of the so-called "secular" subjects — will lay the foundation of a Christian world view in students.

The MBCI Philosophy of Christian Education

During its four decades the MBCI has been compelled again and again to elaborate the reason for its existence. The founders knew well enough why they had expended effort, time, and money to start and continue the school, sometimes against almost insurmountable obstacles. They were succeeded by others who inherited a well-established work, but also the difficulties of financing a rapidly-growing enterprise. These leaders, too, had to have good reasons for the continuance of the school. When the school became the property of the Conference in 1964, questions were raised again why a school like the MBCI was necessary.

A clear philosophy was needed. The first one was tabled in 1966, the next



The choir presenting its annual Christmas concert

one in 1974, and the third in 1982.

The 1966 "Philosophy of a Christian Private School" stated that the purpose of Christian education was to show God as the source of all truth and

reality. Since God is truth, and is omnipresent He is a part of all school subjects, whether mentioned directly or not. Therefore, Christian teachers cannot leave God out of their subject. Since textbooks are written from a humanistic, scientific perspective, Christian teachers must round out the truth by suggesting Christian dimensions as well. "Christian education must not attempt to guide young people around intellectual theories, which strike at the heart of our Christian faith, but rather ground their faith on a Christian theistic world view of the nature of reality."¹¹ Christian education must assist students in the search for truth and foster a spirit of worship and devotion. It must lead students to a commitment to God, to an understanding of God's will for their lives, to Christ as the pattern for character. The goal is integrated personalities, that is, the development of the "spiritual, intellectual and physical aspects of man," and this not only for the student's good but also for the service of the economic, physical and spiritual needs of others.¹²

Such a philosophy of education, the writers claimed, was necessary "in view of the secularization of society, the crumbling of standards of morality, the growing materialism of our culture and the seeming purposelessness of life."¹³ These goals would be realized, it was emphasized, by close cooperation of home, church, and school.

To a large extent the "Statement of Aims and Philosophy of the MBCI" of 1974 expressed the same goals as the 1966 declaration. It enlarged on the fact that Christian education must bring a student into a right relationship with God by recognizing his sinful state and then being cleansed by faith in Christ, and that in a brotherhood all are called "to support each other in encouragement, service and mutual discipline."¹⁴ It also stressed the student-teacher relationship and that "all subject material is approached from a perspective which views God as the source of all truth."

In brief, the aim of the school was "to provide a viable Christian alternative to the public high school system by providing a basic curriculum that meets the requirements of the Manitoba Department of Education augmented by a strong Bible and Music program."¹⁵

The 1982 dismissal of the school principal brought the aims of the school to the fore again. Delegates to the Manitoba convention felt that perhaps the original goals were no longer followed as punctiliously. A commission was elected to study the goals of a Christian private school in modern times.¹⁶

This commission proposed "General Aims and Objectives" of Christian education, and, perhaps because of the criticism of the school, another "Statement of Particular Aims and Objectives" as well as a summary of the MB Statement of Faith.

The "General Aims" repeated, in effect, the original goals of the school. The "Particular Aims" specified in detail what the MBCI endeavoured to achieve. (See Appendix).

Der Unterstuetzungsverein (Support Society) of the MBCI

When the MBCI began in 1945, it had no equipment of any kind. Money from donations and students' fees was never enough to pay the teachers and the maintenance of the school. A distraught treasurer moaned, "Our winter does not adjust itself to our budget."¹⁷ There was simply no money for lab equipment, microscopes, projectors, pianos, desks, library books, and so on.

After the school had been in operation for two years, Mrs. H.F. Klassen, upon the request of the principal, G.J. Lohrenz, called a meeting of interested mothers in the fall of 1947 for the purpose of organizing a *Unterstuetzungsverein* (support society) to try to supply the much-needed equipment. The women responded enthusiastically. Mrs. Klassen served as secretary for the seven years of the organization's existence.

The women pledged to pray for the school at 10 a.m. every day. They met monthly to plan ways to support the school. Usually they had someone from the faculty, or a pastor from the supporting churches, speak, to inspire them to action.

Their money-making methods varied, but were invariably carried out with efficiency and assurance. They sponsored auction sales, apron sales, literary and music programs. The most profitable and popular event was the annual chicken dinner, for which the country mothers supplied the chickens and potatoes, and the city mothers did the food preparation.

The money earned went for equipment, curtains and blinds, as well as scholarships and stipends for students.



Sports play a major part in MBCI's school life

In the early years the mothers also did the annual housecleaning, washing, scrubbing, and painting of the school building.

To avoid painful rivalry and perhaps embarrassment, these mothers also decided upon a uniform for the girls, and sewed them for their own daughters.

After seven successful years, the *Unterstützungsverein* was dissolved, (a number of the church elders felt that the mothers had too much say in the management of the school). A Home and School organization, with men and women, was begun.¹⁸

The purpose of this new organization was "to support the school in its aims."¹⁹ This suggested moral support rather than financial. The association endeavoured to provide open communication between parents and school, and parents and administration. At its meetings the association discussed the concerns of parents and teachers, such as the moral, ethical, and spiritual standards of the school, or sports, uniforms, and school programs. Financial support was achieved by arranging teas and bazaars. Often the mothers would sell baked goods at school programs.

When the school became the responsibility of the Conference, it, through the Board, took over the financial support of the school as well as the spiritual supervision. The Home and School Association met less frequently, and usually only when a project was contemplated. Still there was room for parent participation. Parents in one church might occasionally get together and make suggestions to the Home and School. In recent years projects like buying a bus and installing computers have been successfully carried out. To finance these, donations and collections were asked for. Garage sales have become very popular, and banquets are arranged by the Board. The chairman of the Home and School is an ex officio member of the school's executive, relaying parental concerns to the executive.

NOTES Chapter 15 A

Most of the information has been taken from *A Place Called Peniel* by G.D. Pries, and personal interviews with Pries.

1. Pries, G.D., *A Place Called Peniel*. (Altona, MB: D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1975), p 31.
2. *Peniel*. p. 69.
3. *Peniel*. p. 19.
4. *Peniel*. p. 70.
5. *Peniel*. p. 37.
6. *Minutes of the Canadian Conference*. 1944.
7. *Peniel*. pp. 85-86.
8. H.H. Redekopp's Report to the Manitoba Conference, 1951.
9. L. Doerksen in a letter to the WBI Executive, dated Nov. 7, 1968.
10. From the WBI *Bulletin*. Jan. 19, 1969.
11. H.R. Baerg's Report to the Manitoba Conference, 1978, p. 70.
12. *Peniel*. p. 71.
13. *Peniel*. p. 108.

14. *Peniel*. p. 130.
15. *Minutes of the Manitoba Conference*. 1975.
16. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1983.
17. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1983, p. 23.
18. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1967, pp. 73-79 (see Appendix).
19. *Peniel*. p. 23.
20. *Peniel*. p. 162.
21. *Peniel*. p. 157.
22. *Peniel*. p. 165.
23. *Peniel*. p. 177.
24. *Peniel*. p. 182.
25. *Peniel*. p. 18.
26. *Peniel*. p. 189.
27. *Peniel*. p. 169.
28. *Peniel*. p. 175.
29. *Peniel*. pp. 52-58.
30. *Interview*. Rev. Henry Regehr of Steinbach.
31. *Interview*. Dietrich Klassen of North Kildonan.

NOTES Chapter 15 B

1. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1945.
2. *Canadian Conference Minutes*. 1946.
3. These "Statuten" were prepared by C.C. Warkentin and a few interested brethren.
4. See Appendix.
5. *Principal's Report*. 1983.
6. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1983, p. 26.
7. Pamphlet issued by MBCI to parents and students, 1981-82.
8. *Interview*. Harry Wall.
9. *Principal's Report, Manitoba Minutes*. 1966, p. 68.
10. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1955.
11. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1966, p. 70.
12. *Manitoba Minutes*. p. 71.
13. *Manitoba Minutes*. p. 71.
14. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1974, p. 82.
15. *Manitoba Minutes*. p. 83.
16. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1982, p. 34.
17. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1947, p. 26.
18. Reddig, Willa. *A History of the MBCI*, a paper written in partial fulfillment for a University course "History of Canadian Education," 1979, M.B. Archives, Winnipeg.
19. *School and Home Guidelines*.

Part VI

WORKERS TOGETHER
WITH HIM
(2 Cor. 6:1)

Chapter 16

COOPERATIVE ACTIVITIES WITH OTHER CHURCHES AND ORGANIZATIONS

A. Inter-Mennonite Relations

Historically the Mennonite Brethren have been cautious and reluctant to join other Mennonite denominations in worship. John A. Toews ascribes this disinclination to a lack of proper historical perspective, a lack of a first-hand knowledge of other Mennonite groups, and a lack of true humility.

This has changed a great deal, and even though there is still little joint worship today, Mennonites have gained, in the last sixty years, a better understanding of each other's goals and methods, and they enjoy a mutual respect. Years of difficult pioneering and dependence upon one another, and later the greater ease of transportation and communication, developing education, and the Canadian "melting pot" have made Mennonites more tolerant of each other: a spirit which has facilitated cooperation in areas of benefit to all.

This mutual understanding has given rise to the hope by some that the Mennonite denominations could again be united into one church. Individual interpretations of the Bible have at various times separated the Mennonites, however, and once taught from childhood that one's forefathers particular interpretation is the accurate one,¹ it is not easy to submit to the conviction of others. "Compromise" is still a difficult word for a Mennonite.

Bible Conferences

The Bergthaler Church had its first *Bibelbesprechung* (a Bible conference with several ministers expounding the same Bible passage and discussion by the audience) in 1914. For the next one, in 1917, Mennonite Brethren were also invited. For the 1920 conference Johann Warkentin, pastor of the Winkler MB Church, was a member of the program committee. The 1922 Bible conference took place in the Kronsart MB Church.²

In 1925 a *Bibelbesprechung* was arranged by the Winkler Bible School

and had the following speakers: A.H. Unruh, Abram Peters, H.A. Neufeld, and P.H. Neufeld of the Mennonite Brethren Church and H.H. Ewert, Benjamin Ewert, David Schulz, Jacob Hoepfner, Gustav Penner, and J.J. Siemsen of the Bergthaler Church. A.H. Unruh expounded 2 Corinthians and the others lectured on various problems of youth and their educational needs.³

The final united conference was held May 30-31, 1927 in Altona. After that each conference continued on its own. The reasons for this regrettable discontinuance of joint meetings are not recorded.⁴ In local situations, when the MB Church had a Bible conference the other Mennonite churches often attended and vice versa.

Evangelism

In recent years evangelistic campaigns have been successfully held together with other churches. George R. Brunk, well-known evangelist from Pennsylvania, conducted the southern Manitoba Crusade in 1957 with most Mennonite churches participating. His crusade at Steinbach and Winnipeg were also joint efforts.⁵ Perhaps because Brunk was from the Old Mennonites, a denomination that does not exist in Manitoba, he was acceptable to most churches. On the other hand, by the early 1960s, the growing understanding and openness toward other denominations made possible joint efforts in the Janz Brothers (1960), J.J. Toews (1961), Barry Moore and Wes Aarum campaigns.⁶ In local settings, too, when an MB Church invites an evangelist or Bible teacher, the neighbouring churches are invited. The Mennonite churches do this as well.

Educational Efforts

The controversy between Gretna and Altona over the Mennonite Educational Institute after 1905 did not involve the Winkler MB's. Yet the MEI Board of Altona was able to persuade Johann Warkentin of Winkler to join John Hiebert of Altona to go to the U.S.A. in search of a principal, and also participate in the dedication of the school in 1908.⁷

The Winkler Church minutes, however, do not mention any participation in the Altona school. It must have been the support of one man, Warkentin. When the MEI experienced financial difficulties and "closed temporarily" in 1916, there is an entry in the Winkler Church minutes that a letter from the *Lehrdienst* (council of ministers and deacons) of the Bergthaler and the Sommerfelder churches was received to solicit Winkler MB support. The Winkler Church replied that it would be willing to join, but wanted to know the details of such participation, such as which subjects would be taught, the collection of tuition, the school's administration, and the government's response to the school.⁸ The follow-up to this letter is not known.

Later there must have been some support of the MEI by the Winkler MB Church, for when the Board solicited the participation of the Sommerfelder Church in 1920 (which in the meantime had withdrawn its support), it continued to refuse, saying it was not "interested in joining the Bergthaler and MB efforts."⁹ Two of the MEI teachers, H. Neufeld and Isaac Warkentin,

were from the Winkler MB Church.

In 1926 the Altona MEI was completely destroyed by fire. Instruction was revived for one year only.

In 1930 the MB Conference received an appeal from the Gretna Mennonite Collegiate Institute (MCI) for assistance. It was decided that the churches should respond individually to this request. Nothing came of it.¹⁰ In 1931 it was proposed to turn the MCI over to a society consisting of various conferences. The MB Church seemed to be in favour, according to Gerbrandt, although no record of such a society in actual operation can be found.¹¹

Throughout the following years appeals were made to support the MCI. In 1936 the General Conference of the Mennonite churches responded by taking over the school, but not to the exclusion of other Mennonite churches, as David Klassen explained to the MB Conference, appealing to them to join in the management of the school. The MB Conference elected a committee to study this matter: Heinrich Goosen, C.A. DeFehr, C.F. Klassen, Heinrich Toews, Johan P. Braun.¹²

Since up to 35 percent of the students at the Gretna School came from Mennonite Brethren families, the MCI Board of Directors tried hard to draw in the MB Conference. One of the teachers, Dietrich Esau, was an MB, as was the girls' dormitory supervisor, Rev. John Andres.¹³

It took the concerted efforts of a few men like Franz C. Thiessen, C.F. Klassen, and C.A. DeFehr, dedicated to education, to persuade the Conference that since MB youth attended, the churches should also support it. The following resolution was written and carried by the 1939 convention.¹⁴

"The *Vertreterversammlung* of the Manitoba MB Conference acknowledges the great importance of schools for the future of our people. It is, therefore, necessary to have qualified teachers for our schools, where our children will be educated in the Spirit of Jesus Christ and prepared for life. This has been the endeavour of the MCI in Gretna, and the *Vertreterversammlung* acknowledges the efforts of this school to prepare our young people as teachers of our schools and Sunday school, as workers in our youth endeavours and other tasks. Also the great 'Erziehungsarbeit' (task of training) of the school is highly appreciated. The *Vertreterversammlung* decides to give the MCI full moral and, 'according to means', financial support, and to develop a closer relationship with it."

It was also recommended to attend the special school conference called for July 5, 1939 at Morden.

Although several MB men were co-opted into the Board of Directors of the MCI and financial support amounted to many thousands of dollars, a close relationship did not exist. When MB parents in and around Winnipeg moved to establish their own private school, support for the MCI quietly diminished and eventually stopped.

When in 1952 the request for closer cooperation was repeated, the reply was a courteous refusal. The MB Conference acknowledged the value of the MCI and the blessings it had spread through the years. It was happy that the

school progressed and that its finances were resolved; and it had no objection when the General Conference of Mennonites referred to the MCI as "our school."¹⁵

Another cooperative effort of all Mennonite churches was the teaching of Religion and German in Mennonite public schools. The 1916 Manitoba Education Act permitted schools to teach religion from 3:30-4 p.m. if there were at least ten participating students. Both the East and West Reserve Mennonites made use of this. Unfortunately there were not enough teachers with a Department of Education certificate. This lack was gradually remedied, particularly in the 1920s when many teachers immigrated to Manitoba from Russia. These learned English, received their Grade XI high school standing, took one year of Normal School and were then readily engaged by Trustee Boards in the Mennonite communities.

The German language was also taught, either before 9 a.m. or after 4 p.m. There was no uniform curriculum for Religion and German. Every teacher developed his own material, or, as five Mennonite teachers in the Arnaud area, both MCs and GCs, met together monthly to develop a curriculum for these subjects.

Because of the diversity of material and teaching methods, the desired results were not always achieved. The trustees of the West Reserve met to correct this situation. In 1960 they engaged D.K. Duerksen, an MB teacher and minister, to visit schools and assist teachers in the teaching of German and Religion. From 1965-70 Peter J. Rempel became the Mennonite inspector. After that the Department of Education took over the supervision of German.¹⁶

B. Cooperation in Relief Efforts

Biblical admonitions to "clothe yourselves with compassion . . ." (Col. 3:12), "do good and share with others" (Heb. 13:16), "be rich in good deeds, and be generous and willing to share" (1 Tim. 6:18), "let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Gal. 6:10), and the overwhelming incentive of responding to Christ's sacrifice (Mt. 25:35,36) were taken very seriously by the early Anabaptists. The principle of sharing remained with the Mennonites through the centuries.

Manitoba's first MB Church, from its very beginning, also followed these injunctions. A year after its organization in 1889 it recommended to its members that they not contract debts without asking and "obeying" the advice of brethren, and, when in financial need, to ask the brethren for assistance rather than go "outside" for it.¹⁷ This help would be given.

When the Mennonites in Saskatchewan (many of them MBs) experienced crop failure and general pioneering difficulties in 1895, the Manitoba church rented a railway car and together with other Mennonite churches filled it with provisions for the suffering brethren and sisters.¹⁸

The Winkler church also collected every Sunday for the *Armenkasse* (a special fund for the poor).¹⁹ Again an entry in the church minutes of 1905 reads

that a special fund was to be established to assist needy people who were settling in the neighbourhood.²⁰

Cooperation in relief work had few problems and was usually given ready assent. Material aid was for all Mennonites, a labour of love, the willing duty of a Christian to those in need. And, according to the biblical injunction, the first to be considered were other Mennonites in need.

In 1917 the church decided to buy Red Cross bonds on the condition that the money be used for non-military purposes.

To assist Mennonites in Russia immigrate to Canada an inter-Mennonite meeting was called April 11, 1922 at Altona. This meeting decided that all Mennonite conferences of Canada be invited to participate. A committee with two members from the Bergthaler Church, one from each of the MB, Old Mennonite, Brethren in Christ, and Sommerfelder churches, and one for all the others (Bruderthaler, Kleine Gemeinde, and Holdeman) was to be established.²¹ The MB member was Heinrich A. Neufeld from Saskatchewan. This committee became known as the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization - CMBC. It negotiated with the CPR for the transportation of the immigrants. Eventually more than 21,000 Mennonites came to Canada with a transportation debt of \$1,767,398.68.²² The small MB community around Winkler cooperated actively with the CMBC.

The particular needs of the immigrants, such as their travel debt, of indigent and sick people among them to avoid deportation (the Canadian government's condition for entry was that the immigrants not be public charges for at least five years) required the organization of all the immigrants in all provinces. The first inter-provincial meeting of immigrants took place at Reinland, Manitoba on November 23-25, 1927. One result of this meeting was a fifty cent levy on all immigrants between the ages of sixteen and sixty.²³ All the Mennonite Brethren immigrants, scattered all over Manitoba, were included.

A few months after the declaration of war by Canada on September 10, 1939, an appeal for relief for European refugees caused the Manitoba Mennonites to respond quickly. They organized at Altona, January 12, 1940, into a provincial committee. Manitoba, with other provincial committees, formed the Mennonite Central Relief Committee (MCRC) on March 15, 1940. All Mennonite immigrants (*Russlaender*) supported it. This time the Canadian Mennonites (*Kanadier*) of Manitoba went their own way, establishing another relief committee, the Canadian Mennonite Relief Committee (CMRC). The non-immigrant MB churches (Winkler, Grossweide, Krongart) sided with the MCRC and the Western Service Committee.²⁴

Since the MB churches were actively supporting the relief efforts in Europe, the Manitoba Conference heard annual reports by Cornelius F. Klasen. During the first few years of the war the work was done only in England — a children's home, a boys home, feeding people in bomb shelters, and taking care of elderly people in bombed cities.²⁵ MCC of U.S.A. supervised the work. Elfrieda Klassen of Winnipeg, an MB member, worked in England during those years.

By 1944, when countries were freed, relief work was expanded. Clothes and other material aid and food had to be collected. For years the clothes depot was housed in the warehouse of C.A. DeFehr's business in Winnipeg.

After the armistice of 1945, Mennonite refugees, displaced persons (DPs) who had fled from Russia with the retreating German army, required extraordinary efforts by the Mennonites of Canada. Mennonite Brethren willingly supported programs to feed the hungry, clothe them, find shelter for them, and facilitate immigration to countries accepting refugees. C.F. Klassen and C.A. DeFehr, both from the North End MB Church, were especially effective in this work.

Today the MB Church of Manitoba is a full-fledged member of MCC Manitoba.

Alternative Service Cooperation

The Second World War not only stimulated a renewed cooperation of Mennonite denominations for refugee relief, but it also encouraged presentations to the government concerning military service. Even before the declaration of war, nine Mennonite groups met on May 15, 1939 in the Winkler MB Church with David Toews as chairman.²⁶ Unfortunately no agreement was reached on how to approach the government about their non-resistance stance. The Mennonites who had settled in Canada in 1874 insisted that they were completely exempt from military service according to an Order-in-Council of 1873. Their exemption from military service during World War I had confirmed this. The immigrants of the 1920s were not sure they would be included in this provision, for no such promise had been given them. They were anxious to clarify their situation with the government.

When war was declared, the "Canadian" Mennonites (those of the earlier migration) could not agree to join the rest of the brotherhood for an appeal to the government. They organized their own Committee of Elders (Aeltes-tenkomitee). The recent Mennonite immigrants of Manitoba joined the Western Service Committee (*Westliches Hilfskomitee*).

The proposal of the Mennonites to the federal government for an alternative service was received kindly, and in June, 1941, the government announced an Alternative Service plan for conscientious objectors. Consequently, many Mennonite young men worked in national parks, on farms, and in hospitals. Each of the Mennonite denominations organized its own ministry to these camps; unfortunately there was little coordinated action in the religious supervision of these men.²⁷

Immediately after the war the problem of alternative service was high on the agenda of all committees and churches. The experience of the program of conscientious objection and the many young men who chose active military service had made Mennonite conferences aware that non-resistance was no longer accepted by many of their young men. According to research by Kaufman and Harder 23 percent chose noncombatant military service and 48 percent preferred alternative service.²⁸ MB leaders searched for a solution to rectify this situation. The annual reports of the Hilfskomitee from 1948-59

emphatically and repeatedly stressed the need to teach the young people about non-resistance. John A. Toews stated "Our struggle in peacetime is the home front."²⁹ Lectures on non-resistance were held by J.A. Toews, J.H. Quiring, H.H. Regehr, and G.D. Pries. Ministers were to teach non-resistance either from the pulpit or in small groups. Material on non-resistance, most of it written by the Old Mennonites, was made available to the churches for their libraries and for distribution. Peace conferences with other Mennonites were held in Winkler and Whitewater.

The teaching of non-resistance stressed that the peace principles were simply an outgrowth of faith in Jesus Christ, a logical result of one's faith in the Prince of Peace. This was effectively argued by J.A. Toews in his little booklet, "True Non-resistance Through Christ."³⁰ Non-resistance expresses itself in deeds of love and compassion. Young people were urged in peacetime to join "Voluntary Service," to serve in mental hospitals. For several years from 1955 such service was recommended. No statistics are available of how many participated. MCC (US) and the Board of Missions/Services were the sponsors.

Homes for the Elderly

The need for special homes for the elderly was felt early in the Mennonite community. The Berghaler Church proposed a meeting December, 1917, together with MB ministers in Winkler. Jacob Hoeppner and Johann Warkentin were elected to continue to study this matter. In 1918 the MB's withdrew for reasons unknown, perhaps because such a home would likely be built in Altona or Gretna.³¹ Eventually a home was bought in Gretna.

When new efforts were made to build a home for the aged in Winkler, the Mennonite Brethren Church fully endorsed it. The Salem Home was opened June 15, 1955.³²

Tabor Home was begun by a group of Morden townspeople with strong participation of the MB members. The directors of the home were usually MB members. This explains why the management of the home often presented its need to the conventions of the Manitoba Conference. The delegation usually granted permission to collect financial support from MB members, and granted loans of a few thousand dollars to carry the home through difficult times.³³

Hospitals

Local Mennonite churches cooperated to build hospitals in the towns of Manitoba:

Bethel Hospital in Winkler, 1933

Bethania Hospital in Altona, 1936

Bethesda Hospital in Steinbach, 1937³⁴

Concordia Hospital in Winnipeg was founded as a maternity home by a few interested former students of the School of Commerce in Halbstadt, Molotschna, Russia, in 1927. A house was bought at 291 Mackray. This group called itself "Concordia Society" and appealed to all Mennonite churches.

ches for members (membership \$1). They officially organized at the March 29, 1930 meeting and were incorporated March 26, 1931. In 1934 an old sanitarium on Desalaberry Avenue was purchased, renovated, and enlarged, becoming a very successful venture and a blessing for many Mennonites.³⁵

Unfortunately tempers ran high between the General Conference Mennonites and the Mennonite Brethren at the organizational meeting, for the latter felt that membership in the Board was not proportionally distributed. This caused ill feeling for a while, and only time has healed the discord.

Eden Mental Health Centre - Winkler

In 1957 several Evangelical Mennonite Church brethren initiated discussion among Mennonites about establishing a mental health center for southern Manitoba. They interested the Berghaler church, and an organizational meeting was called in 1957. All interested churches and conferences were invited and asked to send one delegate for every fifty members. The MB Church participated, although it could send its patients to Bethesda Home, a mental hospital owned by the Canadian MB Conference, in Vineland, Ontario.

After much discussion the meeting passed a resolution: "To establish an institution for the nursing and healing of the mentally ill." The next meeting was called for December 27, 1958. After a lengthy debate it was decided to build the institution in Winkler.

The desire to build a health center constituted a change in attitude toward the mentally ill, who were to be treated in familiar Mennonite surroundings to accelerate recovery. It showed Christian love and care which easily transcended denominational lines.

After the decision to build, the approval of the Manitoba Department of Health had to be procured. The Department, together with the Mennonite Committee, studied various possible services. This took considerable time. After much research and prayer the Committee followed the advice of the Psychiatry Division of the Department of Health to plan a modern active treatment center with in-patient and out-patient facilities.

At the July 25, 1964 meeting of representatives of the various Mennonite conferences and churches, the Board was authorized to sign the agreement with the government. The delegates also agreed to accept their part of the financial requirements. Grants came from the Manitoba and the federal governments.³⁶

The health center opened officially on June 3, 1967. The first year forty-five patients were admitted, some of them transferred from Brandon, Selkirk, and Bethesda Hospital, Vineland. The first resident medical director was Dr. Clarence Labun (1969-72) and the second Dr. Henry Guenther (1976-81).³⁷

Delegates from all participating conferences convene annually to hear a comprehensive report of the progress of the Centre. Board members are elected by representative conferences proportionally according to membership. The Eden Centre has become one of the finest all-Mennonite cooperative ventures in Manitoba.³⁸

NOTES Chapter 16

1. Toews, John A. "Mennonite Brethren in Inter-Mennonite Endeavours" *Direction*. July, 1978, p. 3.
2. Gerbrandt, Henry J. *Adventures in Faith*. (Altona, MB: D. W. Friesen & Sons, 1970), pp. 361-362.
3. Pries, George D. *A Place Called Peniel*. (Altona, MB: D. W. Friesen & Sons, 1975), p. 65.
4. *Adventures*. p. 362.
5. *Adventures*. p. 305.
6. *Adventures*. p. 305.
7. *Adventures*. p. 265.
8. *Winkler M.B. Minutes*. 1916.
9. *Adventures*. p. 269.
10. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1930.
11. *Adventures*. p. 272.
12. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1936.
13. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1936.
14. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1939.
15. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1952, p. 75.
16. Manitoba Department of Education has a German bilingual program which is taught wherever it is desired and possible. Education consultants direct the curriculum.
17. *Burwalde M.B. Minutes*. January 12, 1889.
18. *Burwalde M.B. Minutes*. Nov. 12, 1895.
19. *Burwalde M.B. Minutes*. Nov. 28, 1895.
20. *Winkler M.B. Minutes*. Feb. 5, 1905.
21. Epp, Frank H. *Mennonite Exodus*, (Altona, MB: D.W. Friesen & Sons, 1962), p. 73.
22. *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. "Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization" by Jacob Gerbrandt, Vol. I, p. 507.
23. *Mennonite Exodus*. p. 205.
24. *Mennonite Exodus*. p. 328.
25. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1941.
26. Toews, J. A. *Alternative Service in Canada During World War II*. (Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1959), pp. 32-33.
27. *Alternative Service*. p. 100.
28. Kauffman, J. Howard and Harder, Leland. *Anabaptists Four Centuries Later*, (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1975), p. 133.
29. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1953.
30. Toews, John A. *True Non-resistance Through Christ*. (Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1955), p. 35.
31. *Adventures*. p. 289.
32. *Adventures*. p. 290.
33. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1966, p. 12.

34. *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. "Inter-Mennonite Relations" by H.S. Bender, Vol. III, p. 47.
35. Dueck, Abe J. *Concordia Hospital 1928-1978*. (Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1978).
36. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1966, pp. 50-55.
37. *Manitoba Minutes*. 1967, pp. 97-98.
38. Neufeld, Vernon H., ed. *If We Can Love*, (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1983), "Eden Mental Health Centre" by Gerhard Ens, p. 207.

PART VII

FOR OTHER FOUNDATION
CAN NO MAN LAY THAN
THAT IS LAID WHICH IS
JESUS CHRIST (I Cor. 3:11)

Chapter 17

INFLUENCES

A. Influences upon M.B. Theology and Practice

The state of flux that invariably accompanies a sharp breaking away from a traditional base, was mitigated in the case of the Mennonite Brethren in 1860 by their firm reference to the Word of God and by their clear reversion to the teaching of Menno Simons. Every step into their new life had to have the corroboration of the Scriptures. They did not formulate a new theology but simply followed the instructions of the New Testament, depending on the Holy Spirit for the correct interpretation. Nevertheless, the break from the old church left them vulnerable to influences from outside. J.B. Toews states that this openness can be traced to their simplistic faith and the absence of a strong doctrinal, theological identification.¹ Some of these influences enriched MB life, others again constituted dangers to their biblical thinking and practice.

From the beginning the Mennonite Brethren, although steadfastly anchored in the Bible, readily exposed themselves to evangelical movements that also operated from the base of Scriptures. Pietism (as promulgated in Germany) had perhaps the greatest impact upon the thinking and practice of the MB Church. It emphasized the necessity of conversion, a crisis experience of repentance and acceptance in faith of Christ's forgiveness, and stressed the devotional aspect of the Christian's life. The MB Church also insisted upon a life of discipleship as taught by Menno Simons. It has been assumed, but often questioned, that through the influence of a few Baptists and their writings the MBs began to baptize by immersion.

When some of the early Mennonite Brethren immigrated to America in 1874, they brought these influences with them. Again, settlement in a new country opens people to new influences, and in trying to adjust, they begin to adopt new ways of life and the thinking of the surrounding communities, (unless, as did the Manitoba Mennonites of 1874, they settle in closed communities away from others). The American MBs were open to the influences of the evangelical movements of that time. Although mass evangelistic campaigns were completely foreign to Mennonites, the Moody and Sankey services were admired, and altar calls were gradually introduced in MB

churches. The songs of Sankey, too, readily found their way into Mennonite Brethren circles.

When, ten years after their arrival in America, the MB Conference began its missionary efforts in Manitoba, a number of doctrinal principles were already firmly established. To become a Christian a person must realize his sinful state, repent, accept Christ's forgiveness, and walk "in newness of life." A public confession of faith, followed by baptism by immersion, was expected. Only such baptized people were accepted as members of the church.

The Mennonite Brethren Church of Manitoba accepted these convictions, and followed them faithfully. These early MBs retained the Old Colony Mennonite characteristic of avoiding contact with the world through complete isolation. Still, some organizations imposed themselves upon the Mennonites. The Winkler church issued repeated warnings against the false teachings of the "Swedenborgs," proponents of the *Allversöhnungslehre* (Universalism). Although the Adventists made slight inroads into the Mennonite church in 1894, the MBs seemed to have been untouched.²

The first Winnipeg city missionary, William Bestvater, who had studied in the U.S., was greatly influenced by renowned Bible teachers like Gaebelein and Evans, who held Bible conferences in Elim Chapel in Winnipeg. Some of these were mild and others convinced dispensationalists. Bestvater openly acknowledged being influenced by them and the Scofield Bible. Almost imperceptibly the ideas of dispensationalism crept into MB thinking.

Year later when Mennonite Brethren members studied at Moody Bible Institute and schools like it, they brought home strong convictions of their teachings. Some Mennonite Brethren Bible schools outside of Manitoba began to teach dispensationalism with Bestvater's textbooks for Bible schools used extensively.³ The Winkler Bible School did not use them, however, for the teachers Unruh and Wiens were not in agreement with that teaching. Dispensationalism did not necessarily detract from the MB doctrinal position; it tried to explain the Bible by dividing it into seven periods of revelation.⁴ The danger it promulgated was the arbitrary assignment of Scripture to a particular period of time, which made certain passages not applicable to the Christian life today.

With the influx of MBs during the 1920s certain European influences entered the church in Canada. A number of leading ministers had studied in Germany or Switzerland. A few had regularly attended the Blankenburg Conference in Germany, and certain European expositors were also invited to the Mennonite colonies in Russia. All this had lasting effects upon the church.

The writings of J. Bengel, a great German expositor, and the teachings of Darby, the founder of the Plymouth Brethren, concerning the "end times" were gradually accepted by Mennonite Brethren in Russia. "End times" as taught by these men set forth the dispensational-premillennial stance, that is, the rapture of Christians first, then the tribulation, followed by a thousand years of Christ's reign on earth. Jacob W. Reimer, who came to Manitoba in 1928, a resident of Steinbach, was eagerly sought by the churches to expound "end times." He was a forceful speaker. States A.A. Toews, the writer of Men-

nonite Martyrs, "Brother Reimer was for us the greatest authority in Bible exposition, and we all looked up to him as to a spiritual father. We valued particularly his lectures on Revelation and Ephesians."⁵ Reimer's booklet *Der Wunderbare Ratschluss Gottes mit der Menschheit* became a sort of textbook on the "end times." Several ministers with large charts of future happenings followed Reimer's teaching. Heinrich H. Janzen, also often asked to expound the "end times" says, "This teaching has been unofficially accepted in the course of the years by the entire Mennonite Brethren Church."⁶ This statement is not applicable today. Many of the leaders, Bible school teachers, and lay people have questioned the validity of these teachings.

Another influence was the "Allianz" (ecumenical) idea. A few years before the emigration of the 1920s a number of *Allianz-Gemeinden* were created in Russia.⁷ After the immigration Manitoba had only one such church, Arnaud, which soon joined the MB Conference of Manitoba. Its influence can be traced to the gradual acceptance of believers into the MB Church without rebaptism.

In the 1920s another influence entered the church from America—fundamentalism, a movement in opposition to liberalism and modernism. It emphasized "inerrancy of the Bible, the virgin birth of Jesus, the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ, a substitutionary atonement, the imminent, bodily second coming of Christ."⁸ The Mennonite Brethren also stood for these doctrines and so it was not difficult to agree with the fundamentalists. Few became actively involved with them, however, since the movement was outspokenly nationalistic and militaristic. The fundamentalists of today such as Moral Majority are attractive with their insistence on a return to Christian morality, but they have few admirers in Manitoba. A Canadian counterpart, Renaissance, also has few adherents. There is support for its principles but not always for its methods.

Soon after the beginning of this century a movement of inter-denominationalism swept across America in reaction to the proliferation of denominations and the orthodoxy of mainline churches. It was an attempt to join sincere believers from different denominations for the support of Christian education and missions. It stressed the universality of the Christian church and its obligation to the world. Many "faith" missions and also Bible schools were begun with the express intention of emphasizing the oneness of believers.

This idealistic concept of Christianity was, and is, attractive to many sincere Christians, especially to youth. Manitoba young people have attended such Bible schools and some have gone out into mission work with "faith" missions.

In an article in the *Mennonitische Rundschau* John A. Toews pointed out some of the dangers of this movement.⁹ Since it largely disregards the church and stresses conversion and not baptism or membership, it has tended to weaken ethical standards. Of necessity it has to compromise its doctrinal stance because its adherents come from many different Protestant denominations. Church discipline is neglected or avoided. Perhaps, because of Men-

nonite Brethren neglect in emphasizing the importance and role of the church in the Kingdom of God, prospective candidates for missions have preferred to become missionaries in "faith" missions rather than under the Mennonite Brethren Board of Missions/Services.

Another result of the influence of interdenominationalism has been loosening of loyalty to the Mennonite Brethren church. It matters not which denomination you belong to, this attitude says, as long as it is evangelical. Loyalty to a church in itself has little value. Evangelical churches have always been attractive to MBs. A 1964 study states that up to 80 percent of several large Winnipeg Christian Missionary Alliance and Free Evangelical churches are made up of people of Mennonite background.¹⁰ A few other churches could be added: Elim Chapel, Church of the Way, Baptist and Pentecostal churches. This situation is, of course, a concern to the MB Church. There may also be other reasons for this change of allegiance: preference of the English language, marriage to non-Mennonites, objection to the name "Mennonite," or disillusionment with the MB Church and its principles.

The latest influence comes from the charismatic movement which emphasizes the power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believers, speaking in tongues, and the healing power of Christ. Several MB churches experienced unfortunate disruptions of church activities by some well-meaning charismatics' insistence that their teaching was a direct, audible command of the Holy Spirit which all must obey. A few members left the church when they were kindly but firmly asked to desist from propagating charismatic ideas. A direct result of this movement and the subsequent disputations among members was a thorough study by many MBs of the Holy Spirit and his work, research which resulted in spiritual gain and renewal. Unfortunately this study had been neglected ever since the *Froehliche Richtung* of a few members of the first MB church in the 1860s, later generations apparently fearing a repetition of that "exuberant course." That historic happening caused the MB church great discomfiture, for the genuineness of its faith and Christian walk was brought into disrepute. Some years ago A.H. Unruh, one of the greatest Bible expositors of the MB church, was confidentially asked, "Why is there so little preaching on the Holy Spirit?" He humbly answered, "Because we know so little about him." Today ministers and members, thanks to a thorough study of the Bible, speak freely of the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

B. Acculturation

Acculturation (the process of adapting to different cultures and lifestyles) of Mennonites began long before they became urbanized. Although nonconformity was a protective wall for them, it was strongest only in the preservation of the doctrines of faith and non-resistance. In all other areas they have shown adaptability to the environment in which they happened to live.

The Dutch Mennonites in Prussia eventually adopted the German language and with it some of the culture of their surroundings. In Russia, surrounded

by people who were not culturally attractive, they continued to develop to a high degree the abilities and skills they had brought with them from Prussia. They strongly adhered to their beliefs but on the other hand used every means to improve their living conditions. Bibel and Pflug became their motto; religion and farming was their ideal, each sustaining the other. But the Pflug (plow) was invested with greater attention than the Bibel (Bible). They did seem to have acquired a culture of their own.

The Manitoba Mennonites of the 1874-75 migration also became gradually acculturated, adapting to the life patterns that surround them. They soon moved onto individual quarter sections rather than remaining in villages; they readily accepted innovations in farm machinery. There were a few scruples about acquiring rubber-tired tractors, but necessity overcame the qualms. Necessity and acquisitiveness are the first steps in acculturation. There was no reluctance in accepting cars, combines, and fertilizers, or adopting coveralls and the dress of the Canadian people. The immigrants of the 1920s, commonly known as *Russlaender*, also had no misgivings about accepting technological inventions.

The next step in Mennonite acculturation was education. Mennonites have always built schools, but their primary purpose was to preserve their faith and traditional values of ethics and morality. As long as the Mennonites in Manitoba lived on their farms, they kept their language and culture with little influence from outside. With the coming of the railway, and especially with the introduction of school laws, this isolation was no longer possible.¹¹ When the government insisted on compulsory school attendance and its own curriculum, large numbers of Mennonites moved to Mexico and Paraguay. Those that stayed accepted the law. In the 1920s Mennonite teachers with full credentials from the Department of Education began to teach in the one-room schools under Mennonite trustees. As time went on all schools with Mennonite pupils, or where the majority were Mennonite, had a Mennonite teacher. He or she was allowed to teach religion from 3:30 - 4 p.m. in German, and was also allowed to teach the German language after 4 p.m. or before 9 a.m.

An important factor in maintaining Mennonite solidarity was the language. Calvin Redekop states, "The structure of the language one habitually uses influences the manner in which one understands his environment."¹² Therefore, as long as the Mennonites spoke German or Low German exclusively, they were uncomfortable with another culture. Parents used to call the German language their "dike" against the encroachment of the world.

But this "dike" was slowly eroded by an interesting phenomenon: the public school in southern Manitoba combined both secular and spiritual education. In these schools, with time, children's games changed into sports; hymns were supplemented with classical music; programs contained a mixture of religious and secular (more properly said, nature) items. Children became acquainted with the literature of the world, with the history of Canada, with sport activities of America, with life beyond their immediate school and community. At the same time, socially and religiously they remained closely

associated only with Mennonites and church activities. Their Mennonite teachers faithfully upheld the traditional values of ethics and morality. Says E.K. Francis, "(This was an) amazing integration of the new secular school into Mennonite social life as a whole."¹³

In the cities, of course, the situation was different. There the teaching of religion and the German language was not possible. With an enormous expenditure of energy the city churches for many years held Saturday schools, where children were taught not only to read and write German but also biblical truths. As parents themselves adopted the English language in their daily lives, fewer and fewer children attended these schools. Only in the North Kildonan area has such a Saturday school, a cooperative effort of all Mennonite churches, existed until recently. The older people soon became aware that the knowledge of English did not necessarily mean the abandonment of Mennonite values, and their resistance to it as well as the insistence upon German gradually subsided.

A revival of the German language has occurred in the 1980s through the German bilingual program sponsored by the Department of Education after multiculturalism was introduced in Canada. Not nearly all children of MB parents attend these classes.

The general use of the English has opened the church to many Canadian and American influences. Yet it is interesting to note that although most MBs speak English, they are not assimilated; acculturated, yes, but not assimilated, that is, they have not lost their own identity and become completely integrated into the Canadian culture.

Acculturation has influenced the MB family. The most obvious change is family size. A family of seven to twelve children was a common occurrence in the past generations. Now the average family has two to four children. Marriage with non-Mennonites happens more and more frequently. A few decades ago such marriages were entered into by people who strongly disagreed with the MB church and its ways. These most frequently married non-Christians. Today, sincere Christians of different backgrounds often marry. Occasionally the non-Mennonite partner will join the MB Church. Of the 2,979 members of the Winnipeg Mennonite Brethren churches in 1981, 194 had names indicating a non-Mennonite background.¹⁴

Other influences impinge upon urban families. Togetherness is broken. In the country daughters worked with the mother and sons with the father. Close relationships existed. In the city, however, the father goes out to work, and sometimes also the mother, and the children are in school or at work in different places. They may come together at mealtimes, but after that they often go their own way. The training of children is weakened when the only relationship between parents and children is at play, that is, when father and mother are home from work. Methods of discipline lack the authoritative stance of previous generations. The fact that urban children have often acquired higher academic levels than their parents undermines the parental authority.

Effects upon the Church and Christian Life

The many changes pressing upon city dwellers, and to a large extent upon rural people today as well, have their effects upon the church.

The Mennonite churches of years gone by attended to their own needy members, however inadequately. Members helped each other in times of calamity or personal disasters. The West Reserve Mennonites had their own *Waisenamt* to take care of the affairs of orphans and widows, and a *Brandordnung*, an insurance in case of fire. The biblical precept (Jas. 1:27) of looking after the church's indigent was obeyed literally by the first Manitoba MB's.

This concept gradually changed when the government began to offer "relief" during the depression and at the present time gives social assistance. The spiritual benefits of sharing one's goods with the less fortunate is lost, for Christians expect the government to offer what the Bible meant them to do. For the recipient of welfare the monetary, impersonal cheques are much less demeaning than the earlier method of relying on church decisions how much each would get. But at the same time today's churches seem to have forgotten, to a large extent, the economic care of others. "Let them go to the welfare office" is a common directive for needy people. Christians compensate by giving to MCC and other agencies, and that, of course, is commendable. But in impersonal giving there is no personal contact with the needy and that results in spiritual deprivation.

There have also been changes in the worship services of the church. The order of worship has become more rigid, almost to the point of being liturgical. Prayer sessions, a common arrangement in the previous generation, have been eliminated. Choirs strive to sound professional. Every evening of the week is busy with church activities. For a hundred years the unpaid position of the church leader was filled by a lay minister elected by the members out of their own congregation. Today leadership is concentrated in the hands of a fully remunerated pastor, and in many instances, a number of ministers and associates. The sermons, the exposition of God's Word, and methods of Christian education have improved much, because of a better educated staff. An unfortunate result of the pastoral system is that the members can easily expect the paid leader(s) to do all the work, and relax in their Christian responsibilities.

The Christian in urban centers face many other problems in his spiritual life, his relationship to the secular community, his sharing of his faith with others. The less laudable characteristics of the urban society — a sophisticated individualism that feels aloof and independent of the masses, the impersonality that never reaches beyond formal business association, and rigid anonymity, that avoids contact with all, even the next-door neighbour — are inexorable enemies of the Christian koinonia or community.

There are, of course, church members who give up the struggle and disappear in the city crowds. On the other hand, the move from the country to the city made people more aware of what they possessed in order to assure them-

selves of their beliefs. Says Leo Driedger, "Living in cities causes some to assimilate — for others, the majority, it becomes a renewal of faith."¹⁵ Elmer Martens corroborates that: "The challenge of the industrial civilization becomes the occasion not for the abandonment of Christian faith, but for its rediscovery and renewal."¹⁶

Faith for many Mennonite Brethren has become a more thoughtful, deliberate possession. They are more knowledgeable of the tenets of their faith and are more convinced of the correctness of them than ever before. In the last decade there has been a remarkable revival of interest in Anabaptist history with the resulting satisfaction for many that they are still upholding the faith of their forefathers. Others are probing how to regain what has been lost.

For most MBs the Bible is still the inspired and inerrant Word of God. Most of them unquestioningly accept the Word and few are involved in the present "battle for the Bible." The more highly-educated ones occasionally cautiously express some skepticism as to creation, miracles, and the historicity of some Bible events, but biblical doctrines are rarely or seldom doubted.

The Mennonite Brethren spiritual cornerstone is still conversion. Earlier, evangelistic meetings were held in every church at least once or twice a year. Today the methods are often different although evangelistic campaigns have not been totally abandoned. The responsibility of letting others know the good news is put upon individual Christians. Many variations of friendship evangelism are being experimented with. The spirit of the Anabaptists, who enthusiastically spread the Gospel, needs to be recaptured.

Conversion happens any time between childhood and adulthood. Most conversions take place in the early teens. Baptism is on a voluntary basis, for believing young people or adults, occurring most often between the ages of fifteen to twenty, although very occasionally children have been baptized at the age of ten or eleven.

Admission to church membership is still done by public testimony at a meeting of members, who decide whether the conversion of the candidate is genuine or not. Very rarely is a candidate rejected. Because the testimonies of candidates are often inadequate, revealing Biblical ignorance, most pastors conduct pre-baptismal classes to teach the basic doctrines concerning conversion, baptism, discipleship, and church. Memorization of "proof texts" to validate a conversion may have some negative effects when baptismal candidates with questionable spiritual experience apply for membership. Still, the value of biblical teaching outweighs any detrimental consequences.

There was a time when the Mennonite Brethren Church would accept no one without baptism by immersion. All who wanted to be members of the church had to submit to it, even though they might have been baptized upon their confession of faith by another mode. By a decision of the General Conference of the MB Churches in 1963 this has been abrogated. Today believers who have been baptized after their conversion are readily accepted by the MB Church upon their testimony as full members without rebaptism.

The church which at one time was quite rigid and legalistic in its demands for the Christian walk has today relaxed. Discipline, and the spiritual care of members, is still faithfully carried on but mostly by the pastor, although all Christians have this moral responsibility (Heb. 3:13).

Excommunication is not often exercised today. The argument against excommunication is that the church must be "redemptive" which can easily mean that more is excused than what Christ condoned.

Moral values, although "liberated" to some extent, have remarkably kept their traditional standards. Kauffman and Harder, in their very interesting study, *Anabaptism Four Centuries Later* state the following on MB moral issues:

Percentage response "always wrong" in parentheses)

Drinking moderately (51)...Becoming drunk (98)...Smoking tobacco (76)...Smoking marijuana (91)...Using hard drugs (99)...Movies for adults or children (25)...Movies for adults only (55)...Premarital sex (92)...Extramarital sex (92)...Homosexual acts (91)...Gambling (74)...Social dancing (57)...Reckless driving (90)...Income tax evasion (94).¹⁷

Mennonite principles of peace and non-resistance have experienced great erosion after the two World Wars, however, only half of MBs still adhere to them.¹⁸ Few members, furthermore, know the reason why the Mennonites hold to these principles of the Confession of Faith. The churches have been negligent in teaching them. Interest in this Mennonite teaching is usually very high during the war, but wanes considerably in times of peace. With weakened convictions there will also be less opposition to actual participation in armed conflicts.

There was at one time great reluctance about joining labour unions. In times of economic prosperity and the availability of jobs, few MBs joined the union. If there was pressure to do so, they simply found another job. Nearly all Mennonite businesses and factories opposed the establishment of unions in their shops. During the depression and the consequent scarcity of jobs workers joined unions. The church has spoken very little about that situation. A resolution on unions was passed by the General Conference of MB Churches in 1969, not prohibiting the joining of unions but warning members about which union to join, so that Christ would always have the priority.

The state today is not the "ogre" it was in the time of the early Anabaptists. The government exists for the protection of citizens and must be obeyed in its reasonable demands, although whatever contradicts the teaching of Jesus cannot be complied with. Even politics seems to have lost its evil reputation, and MB's are entering the "fickle arena," in order, they say, to offer good government and rectify wrongs.

But separation of state and church is still definitely upheld today. The state has no business in the affairs of the church. It is becoming a stimulating argument whether the church has business in the state.

C. Conclusion

Mennonite Brethren have become totally acculturated. They are beginning to understand and appreciate other cultural values. They can be found in every vocation, profession, and business, and are invariably successful, perhaps a little more than the average. Materially they are middle-class, leaning toward upper class. Educationally they are striving for the highest standards. Economically they have adapted to the competitive culture.

But so far, generally, they are not assimilated. Religiously and socially they are very much on their own. Contact with the outside in schools, factories, professions, and businesses is common, but socially they still generally keep to themselves.

The church is aware of its responsibility to propagate the gospel to others, and great efforts are being made to share the faith and to witness, but few non-Mennonites have joined the MB church. Religiously there is no problem in accepting these people, be they Anglo-Saxons, Vietnamese, Blacks or any others, into the churches, but socially it is still difficult to accept them.

In their more than 450 years of history the Mennonites experienced persecution and peace, poverty and prosperity, hostile cultures and friendly ones, changes of language and customs; they exchanged city life for farming, and then returned to urban living again. In all these vicissitudes of life their faith remained alive. To be sure, it was occasionally little more than a flicker, but at other times an inspiring flame; sometimes there were deplorable aberrations from true faith, but then again joyous revivals.

The Mennonite Brethren Church, since 1860 has also undergone high and low spiritual periods. Also the Manitoba MB Church, in its short 100-year history, has felt debilitating doldrums as well as the stimulation of divine restoration.

But faith in the Lord Jesus Christ never died — the genuine faith, which God gave the Anabaptists through spiritual illumination. That heartfelt faith is still alive today and will assuredly remain so in the future.

From Faith to Faith - to the Glory of God.

NOTES Chapter 17

- 1.. Toews, J. B. "The Influence of Fundamentalism on M.B. Theology" *Direction*. Vol. X, No. 3, July, 1981, pp. 20-22.
2. Gerbrandt., H. J. *Adventure in Faith*, (Altona, MB: D.W. Friesen & Sons, 1970), p. 298.
3. Giesbrecht, H. "Seeking a Faith to Live By." A Study Paper offered at Symposium, Center of M.B. Studies in Canada Nov. 21-22, 1980, p. 18.
4. Harrison, Evertt F., Bromiley, Geoffrey W. and Henry, Carl F. H., ed. *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*. "Dispensation" by E.F. Kevan, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1960), p. 167.
5. Toews, A. A. cited by A.H. Unruh. *Die Geschichte der Mennoniten Brudergemeinde*. (Christian Press, Winnipeg, 1955), p. 827.
6. *Mennonite Encyclopedia*. 2nd ed. 1969. "Chiliasm" by H. H. Janzen, Vol. I, p. 557.
7. Toews, J. A. *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*. (Fresno, CA: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of M.B. Churches, 1975), p. 105.
8. *History of the M.B. Church*. p. 375.
9. Toews, J. A. "Gefahren des Interdenominationalismus" *Mennonitische Rundschau*. Aug. 12, 1981.
10. Friesen, Jim and Vogt, Reinhard. "The Mennonite Community in Winnipeg" *Mennonite Life*. Jan. 1964.
11. Francis, E.K. *In Search of Utopia*. (Altona, MB: D. W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1955), pp. 168, 183.
12. Redekop, Calvin. "Patterns of Cultural Assimilation Among Mennonites" Paper read at the Mennonite Educational and Cultural Conference, 1957.
13. Francis, E.K. "Tradition and Progress Among the Mennonites in Manitoba" *Mennonite Quarterly Review*. Oct. 1950, p. 312.
14. 1981-1982 *Church Directory, 1981-82, Mennonite Brethren Churches of Winnipeg, Manitoba*.
15. Driedger, Leo. "The Anabaptist Identification Ladder/Plain-Urbane Continuity in Diversity."
16. Peachy, Paul. "Some Theological Reflections on the City" *Mennonite Life*, Jan. 1964.
17. Kauffman, J. Howard and Harder, Leland. *Anabaptists Four Centuries Later*, (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1975), p. 123.
18. *Four Centuries Later*. p. 133.

APPENDIX

- A. Constitution - Lindal
- B. List of Moderators of the Manitoba Conference
- C. Resolution concerning the spiritual care of newly converted people of the Randmission
- D. Home Missions Policies 1964
- E. Philosophy of Bible School
- F. Rationale for a Christian Private School
- G. Aims and Philosophy of MBCI 1974
- H. Aims and Philosophy of MBCI 1982

Constitution of Canada Inland Mission Chapel of Thornhill (Lindal), Man.

I. Confession of Faith:

1. We believe in one God existing in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Ghost.
2. We believe that Jesus Christ was begotten by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, and is true God and true man.
3. We believe that man was created in the image of God; that he sinned, and thereby incurred, not only physical death, but also spiritual death which is separation from God.
4. We believe that Jesus Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, as a substitutionary sacrifice; and that all who believe in Him are justified on the ground of His shed blood.
5. We believe that each individual must make the experience of a personal regeneration, being born again of the Holy Spirit by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, thereby becoming a child of God.
6. We believe in the resurrection of the crucified body of our Lord, in His ascension into heaven, and in His present life for us as High Priest and Advocate.
7. We believe in the personal and imminent return of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
8. We believe in the bodily resurrection of the just and the unjust, the everlasting blessedness of the saved, and the everlasting punishment of the wicked.
9. We believe that sin is a reproach to any people. Anyone who professes to believe in Jesus Christ, yet liveth in sin and does not repent, cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. Gal.5 and 1 Cor.6.

II. Organization of Offices and Duties:

1. The Pastor:
 - a. The pastor is appointed by the Home Mission Board of the Mennonite Brethren Conference of the province of Manitoba. He receives his support from the Home Mission Board.
 - b. The pastor is the leader of the church and ex-officio member of every organization in the Church.
2. Committees called for to meet a standing need in the church shall be elected by the church.
3. Sunday School:
 - a. The Pastor, the Sunday School Superintendent and one member who are both elected annually by the church, constitute the Sunday School Committee.
 - b. The Local Sunday School Board has the responsibility of operating the School in a manner which best meets the need.
4. The Board:
 - (1) Election and organization of the Board.
 - a. The board of the church shall consist of the pastor and four members of the church. These shall be elected by the church for a period of two years. Elections of two members is held every year at the annual business meeting, where members are elected or re-elected to take the place of those whose time has expired.
 - b. Following the annual election the board organizes. The Pastor becomes chairman, and the vice-chairman and secretary are appointed. These preside at both the board and the general business meetings of the church.
 - (2) The Duties of the Board:
 - a. To have oversight of the spiritual life of the church. The Board automatically receives the authority from the church to watch over each individual member's Christian conduct and growth. When inconsistencies are suspected or present the Board is under obligation to investigate the matter and deal with it as deemed necessary and in accordance with scriptural principles. Each member of the church is under obligation to receive such an investigation or admonishment without offense. Whenever the Board takes action it is not on its own authority but with the power of authority given them by the church in the spirit of love. Heb.13:17; Matt.18:15-18; Gal.6:1-2.
 - b. To have management of the temporal and financial affairs of the church.
 - c. To assist in the raising of money for home and foreign missions.
 - d. To present to the annual meetings of the local church a detailed statement of receipts and expenditures.
 - e. To submit recommendations to the church and to carry out the resolutions of the church.

- f. To find necessary visiting speakers as Bible expositors, evangelists, missionaries or as the need may arise.
- g. General business meetings or board meetings shall be called for by the pastor.
- h. The pastor shall be chairman at all business meetings. When it becomes necessary to call a meeting during the absence of the pastor then the vice-chairman of the board presides.

III. Membership:

1. Membership defined:
 - a. Regular membership:
A member is one who has been received into the church by the church upon his confession of faith in Christ as His personal Saviour and his consistent Christian life, having received baptism by immersion as an act of obedience to God and of testimony to the world.
 - b. Affiliated membership:
Such Christians as live in the district but like to retain their church membership in their home church, can be received into spiritual fellowship (communion) but are not entitled to vote.
2. Receiving into membership:
Candidates for baptism and membership are accepted by the Board and are given the necessary instruction as to the doctrine of baptism and of the Christian life in general. The candidate is then given the opportunity to relate his or her Christian experience to the church. He is then open for questioning, after which it is decided by the church whether the candidate is accepted. When one or more candidates ask for baptism the church will seek to meet the candidate in his request.
3. The Removal of membership:
The granting of certificates of removal shall be decided upon by the church. Any member who applies for a certificate of removal is entitled to it unless he is under discipline or his conduct as a member of the church calls for an inquiry. In the latter case he is entitled to ask that an inquiry be made without unnecessary delay.
4. The privileges of the members:
 - a. All members are entitled to vote.
 - b. All members in good standing are expected to partake of the Lord's Supper.
 - c. All members have the privilege of receiving an appointment to a church office for which they are qualified.
5. The conduct of the members:
 - a. All members shall conduct themselves in a Christ-like manner in their home, business, social and church life.
 - b. All members shall remain clear from worldly and questionable amusements and impure literature. Only language which is Christ-honoring shall be used.
 - c. Members shall use the affirmation without the swearing of oaths. Affiliation with secret orders is not permitted. Abstinence from the use of tobacco and alcoholic drinks is required.
 - d. Members must in no case become united to an unsaved party in wedlock.
 - e. Honesty is the accepted rule.
6. Duties of the members:
 - a. It becomes the duty of each member to prayerfully and wholeheartedly support his own local church.
 - b. It is the duty of each member to accept responsibilities entrusted him by the church as a God-given ministry.
 - c. It is each member's duty to attend church regularly unless health or climatic conditions make it impossible to attend.
 - d. When a project or resolution which necessitates the interest and support of each member, is accepted by the church by a majority vote, then it is expected and required that each member give the project his entire support as long as it is underway. If a member shall withdraw from such a project without consent he will be open for admonition from the church. When a resolution is passed by a majority vote then each member accepts it.
7. Discipline of the members:
 - a. The Lord's Supper shall be guarded as to participants as closely as possible. When to the knowledge of anyone, things out of order take place at the Lord's Supper, the pastor or the Board shall

- be notified. Children, who are born again abstain from the Lord's Supper until after baptism.
- b. All members become subject to discipline by the church,
Members who will not receive discipline after having been duly dealt with by the church, will be expelled from the church by the church until such a time when they shall repent.
- c. Members under suspension shall not be entitled to the Lord's Supper
- d. When members sin publicly, thus bringing shame upon the church, then genuine repentance followed by a public confession to the church and restitution will be necessary.

IV. The Constitution.

1. The constitution cannot be changed in regard to biblical principles.
2. The constitution can be changed in regard to points where biblical principles are not directly involved, e.g. Number of Board members, time of appointments, etc.
3. The constitution is subject to addition.
4. The constitution cannot be changed or receive addition without a majority vote by two-thirds of the standing members at time of change.

When the Mission Church encounters difficulties in its internal development with which it cannot successfully cope, it shall feel free to appeal to the Board of Home Missions for such council and assistance as it is able to render.

APPENDIX B

The first few years the chairman of the Manitoba Conference was elected at the convention for the duration of the convention. There was no standing organization that supervised matters between conventions, except for the election of a secretary. His main responsibility was the preparation of lists of ministers to serve for special meetings in the various churches.

The chairmen of conventions through the years:

June, 1929	- Johann Warkentin
November, 1929	- Johann Warkentin
May, 1930	- Johann G. Wiens
October, 1930	- Jacob B. Penner
May, 1931	- Jacob B. Penner
September, 1931	- Jacob B. Penner
June, 1931	- Jacob B. Penner
September, 1932	- Johann G. Wiens
June, 1933	- Johann G. Wiens
September, 1933	- Henry S. Voth
May, 1934	- Henry S. Voth
September, 1934	- Abram H. Unruh
June, 1935	- Johann G. Wiens
September, 1935	- Johann G. Wiens
June, 1936	- Abram H. Unruh
September, 1936	- David D. Derksen
June, 1937	- Abram H. Unruh
September, 1937	- Johann G. Wiens
May, 1938	- Henrich P. Toews
September, 1938	- Henry S. Voth
June, 1939	- Henry S. Voth
September, 1939	- Abram H. Unruh
May, 1940	- Henry S. Voth
September, 1940	- Henry S. Voth
June, 1941	- Henry S. Voth
Fall, 1941	- Henry S. Voth
Spring, 1942	- Henry S. Voth
Fall, 1942	- Abram. H. Unruh
Spring, 1943 -	
Fall, 1943	- Henry S. Voth
Spring, 1944	- Henry S. Voth
Fall, 1944	- Henry S. Voth
Spring, 1945	- Henry S. Voth
Fall, 1945	- Henry S. Voth
Spring, 1946	- Henry S. Voth
Fall, 1946	- David D. Derksen
Spring, 1946	- Henry S. Voth
Fall, 1947	- John B. Toews

From now onward there was only one convention a year . . .
 Invariably these were held in the spring, mostly in June.

1948	- John B. Toews
1949	- Henry H. Janzen
1950	- Henry H. Janzen
1951	- John A. Toews
1952	- Henry H. Janzen
1953	- Henry H. Janzen
1954	- John A. Toews
1955	- Henry H. Janzen
1956	- Isaac W. Redekopp
1957	- Isaac W. Redekopp
1958	- John A. Toews
1959	- Jacob H. Quiring
1960	- Frank C. Peters
1961	- Isaac W. Redekopp
1962	- Frank C. Peters
1963	- Herman Lenzmann
1964	- Herman Lenzmann
1965	- John A. Toews
1966	- John A. Toews
1967	- Victor Adrian
1968	- Henry R. Baerg
1969	- Henry R. Baerg
1970	- Henry H. Voth
1971	- Henry H. Voth
1972	- Victor D. Toews
1973	- Victor D. Toews
1974	- Jacob M. Klassen
1975	- Jacob M. Klassen
1976	- Henry H. Voth
1977	- Peter G. Klassen
1978	- Peter G. Klassen
1979	- Jake Falk
1980	- Jake Falk
1981	- Allan Labun
1982	- Allan Labun
1983	- John Epp
1984	- John Epp
1985	- Roland Marsch
1986	- Roland Marsch

APPENDIX C

Resolution concerning the spiritual care of the newly converted
presented by the combined committees of the Randmission, City mission
and Reference and Counsel.

1. According to Scripture all, who have become believers, must be baptized and accepted as members in the church.
2. Such a group of believers is to be known as an M.B. mission of the M.B. Conference under the leadership of the missionary.
3. The missionary is directed to examine the baptismal candidates, to instruct them concerning baptism, confession of faith, church membership, the Lord's Supper, to baptize them with the assistance of experienced brethren, and to administer the Lord's supper.
4. The introduction into the Scriptures and the further instruction of them form an essential element for the strengthening of their faith, for a rationale of manners and customs of their life, and the cultivation of a God-pleasing walk.
5. They are to be educated in the right conception of biblical principles.
6. For Winnipeg the same methods apply according to the special circumstances of a city.,
7. When an M.B. mission is able to manage its own affairs and has a sufficient number of members, she is entitled to be considered an indigenous church of the conference.

Accepted October 1947 by the Manitoba Mennonite Brethren Conference.

Home Mission Policies

I. Terminology:

1. **Mennonite Brethren Mission:** The term designates an effort of the Manitoba Mennonite Brethren Conference to evangelize in a given community by preaching, teaching and visitations in order to establish an organized church of Jesus Christ. Such a mission would be directed by a worker appointed by the Home Missions Committee.

2. **Mennonite Brethren Mission Church:** The term designates an organized Mennonite Brethren Church, which has been accepted into the Mennonite Brethren Church Conference, which, however, is still supported in part and supervised by the Home Missions Committee.

3. **Mennonite Brethren Church:** The term which designates an organized indigenous Mennonite Brethren Church.

4. The above terms will be helpful for the Home Missions Committee and the Manitoba Mennonite Brethren Conference. It will be quite proper, however, for a Mission or a Mission Church to identify itself to its community as a Mennonite Brethren Church.

II. Principles and Polity Applicable to a Mennonite Brethren Mission

1. The Inspection of a Mennonite Brethren Mission:

- a) Mennonite Brethren members who live in an area where there is no Mennonite Brethren Church and where there is no strong evangelical witness, may call on the Home Missions Committee to assist them in establishing a mission. The possibility and feasibility of establishing a permanent work will then be considered by the Home Missions Committee and a recommendation be brought to the Conference.
- b) The Home Missions Committee, after a careful survey of the towns, cities and areas of Manitoba ought to consider the possibility of establishing missions where there is no effective evangelical witness.
- c) If any local church seeks to organize a mission church, it may call on the Home Missions Board to assist in the organization and to help in soliciting new members within the area to form the nucleus of the church.

2. Calling a Mission Worker:

A Mission Worker shall be called by the Home Missions Committee to direct the growth and development of the Mission. His ministry shall encompass those duties associated with the work of an evangelist and pastor. It is expected that under the blessing of God, the fruits of such a ministry will be the establishment of an indigenous church.

3. The Membership of a Mennonite Brethren Mission:

Men and women who accept the Gospel of Jesus Christ and commit themselves to Him as their Saviour and Lord, are candidates for baptism. After instruction in the basic tenets of Scripture and the principles and polity of the Mennonite Brethren Church, and after a credible public confession of their faith, believers should be baptized. These baptized believers are to be considered members

of the Mennonite Brethren Mission, and consequently of the Mennonite Brethren Conference.

The worker too, ought to be a member of the Mission, identifying himself with that group of believers. When a Mennonite Brethren Mission is officially organized, it should consist at least of the pastor and his family and three or four charter members. A charter night will be called under the supervision of the Home Mission Committee. Because each of these members participate in the privileges and responsibilities of the Mennonite Brethren Conference, they have the right of a delegate to the conference. The members should be informed of the broader work of the Conference, as for example, in such areas as foreign and home missions and Christian education (High schools, Bible schools, College). Of particular significance is that new converts in a mission see themselves as members of a larger body and take an active interest in it.

4. The Lord's Supper:

The Lord's Supper should generally be observed once a month. If the worker is not ordained he may be licensed by the Manitoba Conference to administer the Lord's Supper. (The procedure would be to apply to the secretary of the Manitoba Conference: The same procedure would apply with regards to performing the marriage ceremony. Through the secretary of the Manitoba Conference the required license may be obtained.)

5. The Local Budget:

The Mission Worker should submit to the Home Missions Committee the annual budget and send to the Committee the annual financial report. Those who participate in the work of the Mission should be instructed in Christian stewardship and encouraged to assist in the work. It is advisable that the Mission set up a total budget for its needs. This budget should include small amounts for various aspects of Conference work. It should also include the Conference levies, so as to encourage a responsible church membership. It should also include the stipend of the Mission Worker. The Mission should contribute what it can to the budget and request help from the Manitoba Conference for the rest of the budget. It is expected that from year to year more is contributed to the budget by the members of the Mission and less by the Manitoba Conference. The principle of this policy is to set the Mission in the direction of indigenization and to prevent a Mission from isolating itself from the total work of the brotherhood.

6. Reports:

Reports should be sent to the Home Missions Committee periodically, as requested by the Home Missions Committee. The purpose of these reports is to keep the Committee informed of the progress of the work and the current needs, so that it can inform the Manitoba Conference in order to enlist wide interest and prayer support.

III. The Mennonite Brethren Mission Church — Principles and Polity

1. Organization:

The purpose of establishing a Mission is to establish an indigenous

church which will assume the responsibility to extend the Kingdom of God. When a Mission has expanded and has members of spiritual maturity and stability, it should organize into a Mission Church. The official acceptance as a church by the Manitoba Conference marks the point of transition from a Mennonite Brethren Mission to a Mennonite Brethren Church. At this point the church assumes a greater measure of responsibility.

- a) No definite number of members are required; however, the application of a Mennonite Brethren Mission for Mennonite Brethren Mission Church status to the Manitoba Conference is to be done in consultation with the Home Missions Committee.
- b) A Church Council should be elected, consisting of a minimum of three members, including a secretary and treasurer. The pastor assumes the chairmanship of the council. Regular monthly meetings should be held to plan for the task of the church. Minutes of the meetings should be recorded and preserved.
- c) Deacons should be elected as needed. The Manitoba Conference constitution provides the proper procedure. Pastors are called to Mission churches through mutual consultation of the Home Missions Committee and the Mission Church. The call normally proceeds from the Home Missions Committee.
- d) Church Committees not yet in existence should be formed so that effective work can be done. These should include: an Educational Committee, a Young People's Committee, a Board of Trustees.

2. The Church should plan its total activity in such a way as to provide nurture for its members and their families, and an opportunity for Christian service and evangelization in the community. This would include Daily Vacation Bible School, organized home visitations in the community, special services.

Then too, the church should be informed of the broader commission of the church so that it takes an active interest and part in Christian education (Schools, Bible Schools, College) and Foreign Missions.

3. Finances:

As long as the church requires some Conference support, it submits its annual budget to the Home Missions Committee after it has been approved by the Mission Church; the annual financial report should also be sent to the Home Mission Committee. The local budget of a Missionary Church should be set up in accordance with principles suggested in II, 5. With the submission of the budget to the Home Missions Committee, the Mission Church should stipulate the amount of money it will require from the Manitoba Conference in order to meet the budget. It is expected that the Mission Church will take steps to assume the total financial need as it grows in membership.

4. The procedure to become a full-fledged Mennonite Brethren Church:

When a Mission Church is able to assume full leadership and

financial responsibility, it should apply for full church status to the Home Missions Committee, who will then recommend such status to the Conference.

5. Where a Mennonite Brethren Church, for example a rural church, has lost a numbr of members and needs financial help and leadership in order to be more effective in its witness, it may apply to the Home Missions Committee for Mission Church status.

IV. Church Building Policies

When a Mennonite Brethren Mission or Mission Church decides to buy a lot and build a church, the following procedures and policies should be adopted.

- a) The initiative in buying a lot, and in a building program, is normally taken by the local Mission Church. It consults with the Home Missions Committee, which in turn makes a recommendation to the Manitoba Conference. At the time of this recommendation a building plan should also be submitted. The buying of the lot and the building plan should have the approval of the Home Missions Committee and the Manitoba Building Committee, and the Board of Trustees.
- b) The financing of the lot and building is normally to be carried out in the following manner. The Manitoba Conference is willing to provide one-third of the total cost as an outright grant to the Mission Church, and a loan of one-third of the cost. The local Mission Church assumes the financial responsibility for the remaining one-third of the cost and for the repayment of the loan.
- c) The loan to the Mission Church is to be repaid according to the ability of the church. The payment policies are to be established by consultation of the Conference Board of Trustees and the Home Missions Committee.
- d) The construction of the church building is to be carried out by a committee conststing of i) three members of the local Mission Church building committee; ii) the members of the Manitoba Building Committee. The chairman of the total committee shall be the chairman of the Manitoba Building Committee.
- e) The above procedure and policies a) and c) shall also be applied to the purchase of a building by a Mennonite Brethren Mission Church. In such an instance, the purchase shall be carried out by a committee similarly constituted as in d). The recommendation is brought before the Manitoba Conference by the Home Missions Committee, which has been in consultation with the Manitoba Building Committee and the Board of Trustees about the purchase of the building.

V. The Tenure of the Mission Worker.

A pastor is initially called for a period of one year. At the end of the first year the tenure of the pastor shall be reviewed by the Home Missions Committee in consultation with the local

church council. The local church should be given the opportunity to approve the continuing service of the pastor. Thereafter, the service of the pastor shall be reviewed every two years.

If a pastor anticipates leaving his charge to accept a call to another church, he should give notice to the Home Missions Committee a year to six months in advance.

Philosophy of a Bible School

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Christian View of Education

1. A first purpose of Christian education is to show God revealed. God, as Personal Creator of the Universe, is the source of all truth and reality. Real education, therefore, is the process of making known and learning what God's truth is. All three avenues of God's Self-Revelation—His Written Word, His Personal Revelation in Christ, and His Revelation in Nature—must be explored. One implication of God's creation and revelation for the curriculum is that essentially there are no such things as "secular" school subjects. Christian education must not attempt to guide young people around intellectual theories which strike at the heart of the Christian faith, but rather seek to ground their faith on a Christian, God-centred world view of the nature of reality. With an increasing number of young people entering college and university, it is becoming increasingly imperative that Bible schools lay an adequate Biblical foundation and help youth in their search for truth. This purpose is clearly outlined in the following Scripture passages: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32 K.J.V.); "For in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:16, 17, R.S.V.); "Thou hast made him little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honor. Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hand; thou has put all things under his feet" (Ps. 8:5, 6, R.S.V.).

2. A second purpose of Christian education is to foster a spirit of worship and devotion. This may be done through prayer, reading and studying Scripture, sacred music, and fellowship. This purpose is clearly shown in the following Scripture passages: "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Col. 3:16, R.S.V.); "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together... but encouraging one another" (Heb. 10:23-25a, R.S.V.).

3. A third purpose of Christian education is to lead the student to a commitment of his life to God. Christian education must be designed to bring students into conformity with the revealed will of God, thus enabling them to reflect the nature of God in their redeemed personalities. Stress must be laid on the quality of life. The Christian teacher must assist each student to live as he was created to live, in order that he may become what his Creator destined him to be. Paul teaches this purpose in the following

Scripture passages: "I appeal to you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:1, 2, R.S.V.); "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15 R.S.V.); ... training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world." (Tit. 2:12, R.S.V.).

4. A fourth purpose of Christian education is to develop Christian character. Paul, in comparing the Christian life to a race, points out that one of the aspects of Christian character is self-discipline: "Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable" (1 Cor. 9:25, R.S.V.). The character of Christ shall be the pattern for the Bible school student. Jesus explains how this can be done: "Abide in me, and I in you..." (John 15:4a, R.S.V.).

5. A fifth purpose of Christian education is to produce integrated personalities. Paul writes: "That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:17) K.J.V.). Education must seek to integrate the spiritual, intellectual, and physical aspects of man. The individual personality must be raised to higher spiritual levels. Paul reminds us of these high aims in the following passages: "And to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all fulness of God" (Eph. 3:19, R.S.V.); "Until we attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13, R.S.V.).

6. A sixth purpose of Christian education is to provide a proper social goal. Man is a social creature and was made for fellowship with God and his fellowmen. Christian education must strive for the highest possible degree of social-serviceability. If this goal is to be achieved, education must include not only individual but also social development. Certainly, our young people must be trained to take their place in society. The whole Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7, speaks of this purpose, and might be summarized in the Golden Rule given as "So whatever you wish that men do to you, do so to them" (Matth. 7:12, R.S.V.). This Paul also advocates, when he says: "Then let us no more pass judgment on one another, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother" (Rom. 14:13, R.S.V.).

7. A seventh purpose of Christian education is to encourage students to witness to society of their faith. This they should do in their chosen professions and in the ministries of the church. The following Scripture passages point out this purpose very clearly: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well" (Matth. 6:33, R.S.V.); "Always be prepared to make a defence to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence"

(I Peter 3:15b, R.S.V.); "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (I Peters 2:29, R.S.V.).

B. Reasons for Emphasis Upon the Christian View

1. There is a fragmentary approach in much of modern education. The heavy emphasis on specialization can lead to compartmentalization, and the integration of the personality remains incomplete.

2. There is a growing secularization of society. Our society by leaving God out tends to teach our children that eternal values are unimportant.

3. There is a growing flood of immorality. Absolute standards are being questioned by society, and mass communication media are being used, often inadvertently, to undermine Christian ethics.

4. There is evidence of gross materialism in our culture. The vocational guidance programs tend to emphasize the need for financial security, which, to a large measure, becomes the criterion for success.

5. There is a growing frustration in society with the meaninglessness of life. The challenge to commit oneself to worth-while causes seems to be lacking.

C. Agencies for the Realization of the Christian View

1. The home can instill proper attitudes by consistent Christian discipline, by parental example, and by meaningful parent-child discussions, including the maintenance of the family altar.

2. The Church and its related agencies can instill a proper respect for the Word of God, and foster a right relationship to God and man. Through the teaching ministry of the pulpit, and through the influence of its group consensus, it can help to develop Christian ethical standards. The Sunday school, the camp program, the D.V.B.S. program, and other church programs can further stimulate an interest in Scripture and promote positive Christian attitudes.

3. The Christian educational institutions, such as the Bible college, the Bible school, and the high school, can assist the above agencies in imparting a balanced Christian education to young people.

II. The Purpose of the Bible School is:

1. To lead the student to a deeper understanding of God and His redemptive ways with man as revealed in the Scriptures (Col. 2:3; Rom. 11:32-36);

2. To lead the student into a program of intensive Bible study as a means of establishing him in the Christian faith and providing him with principles whereby he may govern his life (Col. 2:7; Eph. 4:12-13);

3. To provide instruction in communication skills, enabling the student to serve more adequately in the areas of teaching, preach-

ing, witnessing, or any other phase of spiritual service (1 Peter 3:15; 2 Tim. 2:15);

4. To provide a program which will challenge the student to a Christ-committed life so that every activity—whether work, recreation, social fellowship, prayer or meditation—will take on spiritual significance (Rom. 12:1-2; Col. 3:17);

5. To offer a curriculum including both general survey courses and careful exegetical studies in keeping with the comprehension abilities and maturity of the students (I Tim. 4:11-16; II Peter 3:18);

6. To enrich the faith of the students through corporate worship and devotion, by means of Bible studies, prayer groups, music or other faith-orientated fellowship groups (Eph. 5:18-21; Heb. 10:25);

7. To help the student develop a mature Christian personality according to the Biblical concept (Ps. 32:8; Matth. 28:20);

8. To inculcate an understanding of, a love for, and a loyalty to the home church. (Eph. 2:21-22; Acts 13:2-4);

9. To encourage the student to witness effectively to his faith within his society (I Peter 3:15; Acts 1:8).

III. The Nature of the Bible School

The Bible School is primarily a post high school institution of Christian education and should meet the criteria stated below:

1. The teacher should:

- a. be soundly evangelical in belief and committed to the ethical standards of the M.B. Conference;
- b. be committed to the Christian philosophy of education of the school;
- c. be thoroughly prepared academically and professionally to teach the assigned courses;
- d. work in unity and harmony with other staff members to realize the goals of the institution.

2. The students should :

- a. be willing to conduct themselves in accordance with the ideals and standards of the school;
- b. contribute to a healthy school climate in which they can grow spiritually;
- c. have the necessary intellectual and academic prerequisites to benefit from the instruction offered;
- d. promote the best interests of the school at all times.

3. The curriculum should:

- a. include a preponderant emphasis on courses of biblical content;
- b. include courses in Christian education, music and missions in keeping with aims and objectives of the school;
- c. include preparatory courses and other courses as may be deemed necessary in the fulfillment of the aims and objectives.

4. The extra-curricular activities should:

- a. be of such a character that they minister to the devotional and spiritual needs of the students;

- b. meet the diversified needs of students by providing an active and inspiring program in the physical, recreational and cultural areas;
- c. provide opportunities for growth in communicating and sharing the Christian faith.

IV. Discipline in the Bible School

1. The need for discipline arises from the following two considerations:

a. Theological

We believe that man, although born in sin, has redemptive possibilities. Before he becomes a Christian, the evil tendencies of the student will have to be restrained; after he becomes a Christian, the student will have to be given definite guidelines for his deportment to assist him to become a mature Christian.

b. Pedagogical

We realize that good discipline is a prerequisite for effective teaching. Disciplinary measures, where they must be used, serve as a deterrent to the potential transgressor.

2. The purpose of all discipline must be redemptive in nature, always considering the dignity of the individual. It should, therefore, be authoritative but not authoritarian in character. It should have the following aims:

- a. It should be preventive, acting as a deterrent;
- b. It should be didactic, teaching a lesson and changing an attitude;
- c. It should be remedial, satisfying the need for retribution;
- d. It should never be retaliatory nor designed to satisfy the desire for revenge on the part of the teacher.

3. The methods used to keep good discipline should reflect the Christian character of the teacher. The methods used may include verbal reproof, campus detention, suspension and expulsion. Suspension and expulsion shall occur only upon faculty decision and in consultation with the executive committee. The executive committee makes the final decision on an expulsion case.

V. Conclusion

Called into existence by God, and by the brotherhood, Bible schools train and equip men and women for effective Christian service. They are a vital agency of the Christian Church and, therefore, deserve our full support. It was Christ Himself who gave the commission, "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world (Matth. 28:20).

In the discussion that followed the presentation of this paper, delegates agreed that the statement in point (d) under 2, of Part IV of this paper, should be revised so as to read: "It should never be retaliatory nor **designed** to satisfy the desire for revenge on the part of the teacher." They also suggested that the statement in (a), under part IV, point 1, be revised in order to clarify its intended meaning. With these changes, the paper was approved by the Conference.

Rationale for a Christian Private School

I. INTRODUCTION

A. View of Christian Education

1. The first purpose of Christian education is to show God revealed. God, as Personal Creator of the Universe, is the source of all truth and reality. Real education, therefore, is the process of making known and learning what God's truth is. All three avenues of God's Self-Revelation—His Written Word, His Personal Revelation in Christ, and His Revelation in Nature—must be explored. One implication of God's creation and general revelation for the curriculum is that essentially there are no such things as secular school subjects. Christian education must not attempt to guide young people around intellectual theories which strike at the heart of our Christian faith, but rather to ground their faith on a Christian theistic world view of the nature of reality. With an increasing number of young people entering college and university, it is becoming increasingly imperative that secondary schools lay an adequate foundation and help youth in their search for truth. Jesus said, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32.

2. The second purpose of Christian education is to foster a spirit of worship and devotion. This may be done through the exercise of prayer, reading and studying of Scripture, the use of sacred music, and fellowship. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God." Col. 3:16.

3. The third purpose of Christian education is to lead the student to make a commitment of his life to God. Christian education must be designed to bring students into conformity to the revealed will of God, thus enabling them to reveal the nature of God through their redeemed personalities. Stress must be laid on the quality of life. The Christian teacher must assist each individual to live as he was created to live, in order that he may become what his Creator destined him to be. Paul says, "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." Romans 12:1,2.

4. A fourth purpose of education is to develop Christian character. The character of Christ shall be the pattern for our high school student. Jesus explains how it can be done: "Abide in me, and I in you." (John 15:4)

5. A fifth purpose of Christian education is to produce integrated personalities. Paul writes: "That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Tim. 3:17)

Education must seek to integrate the spiritual, intellectual and physical aspects of man. Much of modern education has been fragmentary and integration of personality incomplete. The philosophy of self-realization also falls short of an adequate goal. The development of human personality must have a higher goal than social efficiency. The individual personality must be raised to higher spiritual levels, as Paul says: "That ye might be filled with the fulness of God." (Eph. 3:19)

6. A sixth purpose of Christian education is the social goal. Man is a social creature and was made for fellowship with God and his fellowman. The Christian theistic view requires that Christian education strives for the highest possible degree of social serviceability. If this goal is to be achieved, then education must include not only individual but also social development. Certainly our youth must be trained to take their place in society. "So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them." Matt. 7:12.

7. The seventh purpose of education is to encourage students to witness to their faith in society. This they may do later in the professional life and/or in the ministries of the Church. "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well." Matth. 6:33.

B. Dangers to this View

1. There is a growing secularization of society. Our society by leaving God out tends to teach our children that eternal values are unimportant.

2. There is a growing flood of immorality. Absolute standards are being questioned by society, and mass communication media are being used, often inadvertently, to undermine Christian ethics.

3. There is evidence of gross materialism in our culture. The vocational guidance programs tend to emphasize the need for financial security, which, to a large measure, becomes the criterion for success.

4. There is a growing frustration of society with the meaninglessness of life. The challenge to commit oneself to worth-while causes seems to be lacking.

C. Agencies for Realization

1. The Home can instill proper attitudes by consistent Christian discipline, by parental example, and by meaningful parent-child communications, including the maintenance of the family altar.

2. The Sunday School can further stimulate an interest in Scripture and promote positive Christian attitudes through its teaching ministry.

3. The church can help instill a proper respect for the revealed Word of God and thus foster a right relationship to God and man.

Through its teaching ministry and the influence of its group consensus it can help to preserve Christian ethical standards.

4. Similarly the Christian institutions, such as the Bible College, the Bible School, the High School, and the Camp, can help the above agencies.

II. THE PLACE OF THE CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL

A. Significance of the Christian High School

1. A Christian school can give the student a theistic orientation for life which is not often possible in other schools because of our pluralistic society.

2. A Christian school can hold up ideals of purity before the pupil and in a measure keep them from being drawn into impure practices.

3. A Christian school can hold up spiritual values to the pupil which far transcend the material, and in this way students can be motivated to serve God and to put His Kingdom first.

4. A Christian school can challenge students to invest their lives in worth-while causes.

B. Possibilities for the Christian School

1. Our government still gives us the liberty to have Christian private schools, if we are willing to pay for them.

2. Our conference is willing to help with moral and financial support.

3. Our parents are willing to make financial sacrifices for the sake of the spiritual welfare of their children.

4. Many teachers are convinced of the spiritual values of such a school and are willing to teach.

5. We have the minimum of necessary facilities in buildings and equipment.

C. Nature of the School

1. The teaching staff should:

a) Be soundly evangelical in belief and committed to the ethical standards for which the constituency stands.

b) Be committed to the Christian philosophy of education of the school.

c) Be thoroughly prepared academically and professionally to teach the assigned courses.

d) Be unified in its effort to realize the goals of the institution.

2. The students should:

a) Be sympathetic to the ideals and standards of the school.

- b) Contribute to a healthy school climate in which they can grow spiritually.
 - c) Be committed to follow the rules and regulations of the school.
 - d) Be capable of completing the course offered by the school.
 - e) Promote the best interest of the school both in and out of class.
3. The parents should:
- a) Be persuaded of the significance of a Christian education for their children.
 - b) Be in agreement with the ethical standards of the school.
 - c) Be willing to promote the school in the constituency.
 - d) Be willing to permit the staff to carry out its policies without interference.
 - e) Be willing to make the financial sacrifice necessary.
4. The curriculum should:
- a) Provide for a thorough training in the course of studies prescribed by the Department of Education.
 - b) Prepare students adequately to enter further studies.
 - c) Provide an adequate appeal for students with diverse interests and ability.
 - d) Provide for an adequate course of studies in religion with stimulating and thought provoking content conducive to Christian growth.
5. The extra-curricular activities should:
- a) Include special features as required to minister to the devotional and spiritual needs of students.
 - b) Meet the diversified needs of students by providing an active and inspiring program in the physical, recreational, and cultural areas.
 - c) Provide for vocational guidance and counselling in which students are encouraged to go the path of self-denial, sacrifice and Christian service.

D. Discipline

1. Need

- a) Our anthropological consideration of man tells us that man was born in sin with redemptive possibilities.
- b) Pedagogically we realize that good discipline is a prerequisite for effective teaching and disciplinary measures where necessary serve as a deterrent to the potential transgressor.

2. Purpose — All discipline must be redemptive in nature always considering the dignity of the individual. It should, therefore, be authoritative and not authoritarian in character. Therefore positively, discipline should be:

- a) Preventative, acting as a deterrent.
- b) Didactive, teaching something and changing attitudes.
- c) Punitive, satisfying the need for retribution and negatively, it should never be retaliatory or satisfy the desire for revenge on the part of the teacher.

3. Methods — It is understood that in meting out discipline the teacher will be in control of his temper, and that the method will be consistently suited to the offence. The methods that will be used are:

- a) Verbal reproof.
- b) Detention.
- c) Corporal punishment.
- d) Suspension.
- e) Expulsion.

4 . Agents

a) The teacher must be in control of his classroom at all times. Effective teaching and good class rapport will usually achieve this. However, when it becomes necessary the teacher will, with discretion, use verbal reproof, detention, temporary suspension from the classroom, and corporal punishment as a means to maintain control.

b) The principal, when a discipline case is referred to him, will with discretion use verbal reproof, detention, corporal punishment and suspension from school. The disciplinary action taken should be fair and consistent.

c) The School Committee makes the final decision on an expulsion case.

The brief was accepted with gratitude.

Motion: That we use this brief as a guide line for our Christian high school. **Carried.**

Statement of Aims and Philosophy of MBCI

Administrative Structure

The Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute (MBCI) was originated in 1945 by a society dedicated to the task of providing Christian Education at the High School level. In 1964 the Mennonite Brethren Conference acquired the buildings and since that time has provided for the further development and supervision of the program.

Members of the High School Committee are appointed for a three year term by the Manitoba M.B. Conference at its annual convention in June. The committee consists of five members who are responsible to the Conference to make proper appointments for teachers staff and administration. The committee also prepares and presents the annual budget which is approved by the delegates to the annual convention.

M.B.C.I. is located at 173 Talbot on the North of Disraeli Bridge in Winnipeg.

Philosophy

The Christian Church has the ministry of communicating the Truth of God to persons. Christian education is the process whereby persons are guided in developing a life commitment and comprehensive world-view growing out of the complementary nature of revealed and discoverable truth. The dynamic of Christian education accepts the grace offered in Jesus Christ freeing every person from sin's guilt and domination, as well as giving a new quality of life in Jesus Christ. The Christian life is based on the faith in Jesus Christ - a faith that invites a loving response of discipleship relevant to the world today.

We believe that God is at work in the world, and though the pattern of divine activity is often unclear, God will prevail. The Church of Christ is a voluntary fellowship of adult believers created by the Holy Spirit from all peoples. Members of the Church form a brotherhood called to a life of suffering love and are expected to support each other in encouragement, service and mutual discipline. Though influenced by his background and environment, each person is personally responsible to choose the direction of his life.

The process of Christian education is a part of and is built upon the quality of student-faculty-administration relationships. The quality of these relationships also serves as one model for Christian living to students.

With the home and church, the Christian High School is an effective setting in which Christian education may occur. In Christian education the teacher approaches the student as a whole person, stimulating him toward realizing his physical, spiritual, intellectual and social potential. All subject material is approached from a perspective which views God as the source of all truth. Both learning and teaching embrace the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In selecting teachers, staff, and administration, this school gives careful consideration to effective personal relationships with youth and adults, quality of Christian life, and academic excellence and creativity. The school community, therefore,

maintains a program of continuing education and growth in the above areas for both faculty and administration.

General Aims

The basic purpose of the M.B.C.I. may be expressed as follows:

To provide a living/learning environment which strives for excellence in the spiritual, intellectual, physical and social development of the individual, which is based in its entirety on the revealed Word of God.

To provide an educational program in a Christian environment that will prepare youth to make a worthy contribution to the cause of Christ in the home, church, and community, and to help prepare them in those vocations consistent with New Testament Discipleship to meet the needs of mankind wherever found in Christian service and witness.

To provide an atmosphere where students can get a wholesome view of self as persons created in the image of God and where a commitment to discipleship is encouraged.

To promote positive interpersonal relationships where individuals learn to accept themselves and others as important. To assist the individual in the recognition that selfishness, inconsideration and thoughtlessness with respect to others are sins that destroy relationships.

To provide a viable Christian alternative to the public high school system by providing a basic curriculum that meets the requirements of the Manitoba Department of Education augmented by a strong Bible and Music program.

To promote the development of an ability to read, write, listen, observe, to think logically, find reference materials, to communicate worthy ideas and feelings effectively.

To develop a program which provides for relative ease of transfer between schools and to post secondary institutions.

To promote the development of an attitude of acceptance towards persons of various denominational and racial backgrounds.

Disciplinary Statement of M.B.C.I.

M.B.C.I. is a combined JR. and SR. High School dedicated to meeting the needs of all youth regardless of denominational or racial background who desire to benefit from specialized Christian education.

M.B.C.I. students are served by competent teachers especially trained in the area of influence. Each student is expected to conform cheerfully to regulations that pertain to the educational, social and spiritual life of the school. Students who do not respond to the academic and spiritual ministry of the school or do not uphold the standards of regulations of the school, or whose presence in school is harmful to the spiritual life of the school are subject to probationary status suspension, or dismissal. The first and paramount task of our school is to provide quality Christian education for those who are willing to learn.

Specific guides to standards of conduct and specific regulations necessary to the operation of the school community may be found in the student House Rules.

STATEMENT OF AIMS AND PHILOSOPHY OF THE MBCI

"For no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 3:11)

HISTORY

The Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute (MBCI) was founded in 1945 by a Society (Der Mennonitische Hochschulverein zu Winnipeg, Manitoba) dedicated to the task of providing Christian education at the high school level. In 1964, the Mennonite Brethren Church of Manitoba acquired the school facilities and since that time, has supported and supervised its program. From its inception, MBCI has been, and remains, committed to the goal of providing quality Christian education for Mennonite Brethren youth and welcomes students from other denominational backgrounds.

STATEMENT OF GENERAL AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The Mennonite Brethren have their historical and theological roots in sixteenth-century evangelical Mennonite Anabaptism. As a people, Mennonite Brethren are committed to Christian education. Along with the home and the church, the Christian school is an effective setting where the following educational goals can be realized:

- a) to teach the values and beliefs considered to be important by the church community;
- b) to transmit the history and to make clear the identity of the church community;
- c) to help the student develop a Christian world-view; and,
- d) to provide training in skills useful to function creatively and effectively within society.

The primary task of the Christian school is to guide its students in the development of a life commitment based on the belief and teaching that God is the source of all revealed and discoverable truth. The Christian school, therefore, will provide a context for leading people to the new birth in Christ and to a life of discipleship in the service of God and mankind.

STATEMENT OF PARTICULAR AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

In the course of every school year, MBCI will strive to meet the following aims and objectives in accordance with the Confession of Faith of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches:

To provide a disciplined learning environment which meets the educational requirements of the Manitoba Department of Education and provides for admission into all post-secondary educational institutions;

To provide an educational model in which Christ and the Christian commitment form the foundation for all curricula;

To provide a qualified faculty committed to Christ as Saviour and Lord and which demonstrates this commitment by example;

To promote positive relationships among students and between faculty and student body;

To encourage and invite the student to a personal faith in, and commitment to Christ, and to challenge the student to reflect the Lordship of Christ in all areas of life;

To develop the whole person, spiritually, intellectually, socially, and physically;

To provide Biblical study courses designed to inspire a love for Scripture, to promote Biblical knowledge, and to develop sound methods in the study of the Bible;

To provide instruction in, and an appreciation of, the history of the church, and to emphasize the importance of the church as a community of voluntary believers;

To encourage the development of Christian values, ethics and morals; and,

To develop an awareness of local, national and international issues and to provide a response consistent with Biblical discipleship.

The beginnings . . . on a warm afternoon, May 30, 1886.

The location . . . a shady turn of the tortuous Dead Horse Creek
at Burwalde, near Winkler, Manitoba.

The occasion . . . the baptism of two Mennonite couples.

Shortly after that, in 1888, the first Mennonite Brethren Church in Canada was organized at Burwalde, Manitoba. Since that time the Mennonite Brethren have spread across the entire nation of Canada.

From Faith to Faith focuses on the growth of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Manitoba. William Neufeld, after months of research and writing, provides us with a full view of the many facets of the Manitoba Mennonite Brethren.

The Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Winnipeg, Manitoba, has provided the incentive for the publication of this significant work.

William I. Neufeld, presently living in Winnipeg, has spent many years in Mennonite Brethren Conference related activities. He has taught at the Mennonite Educational Institute, Clearbrook, BC, and has pastored a number of Mennonite Brethren churches. For many years he has had an avid interest in writing, research and historical documentation.

William and Hildegard Neufeld live in retirement in Winnipeg, Manitoba. They have four grown children.

